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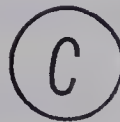




THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

ABSURDIST ELEMENTS IN MACBETH

by




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## ABSTRACT

In the first chapter of this study I have subjected each of ten plays from what Artaud calls the occidental repertory of the last twenty-five years to a brief, if intense, analysis of one element -- thematic or technical -- that might be considered as a characteristic of the contemporary theatre. I have proceeded in the second chapter to subject Macbeth to an analysis employing the elements examined in the first chapter as tools. Through this analysis of Macbeth I have tried to show that the play has aspects often missed by orthodox criticism. Thus in chapter two, section one, I examined the mutually intensifying effects of the comic and tragic scenes. In section two I looked at the Macbeth world as an absurd one similar to those created by Kafka, Camus, and Pinter. Section three describes the nature of equivocation as a central theme of Macbeth; such equivocation leaves each of the principal figures a lonely victim of his world. In section four I explored the quality of dread which surrounds Macbeth's decisions with the sense that he is both trapped and free. By examining the metatheatrical qualities of Macbeth in section five, I noted that there was a heavy emphasis on Macbeth's bondage as an actor under the direction of the witch-playwrights. Sections six, seven, eight, and



nine explore Shakespeare's usage of various types of bisociative acts -- reversal, metaphysical shudder, radical juxtaposition, the fissuring of the banal expression and situation. These, through their evocation of both terror and laughter, cause the audience to feel the absurdity of the Macbeth universe and, by extension, the absurdity of their own. Section ten concludes that Shakespeare is a dramatist working beyond the limits of pure tragedy.



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<u>CHAPTER I</u>	PAGE
Elements of the Twentieth Century Theatre of the Absurd . . . . .	1
 <u>CHAPTER II</u>	
Macbeth as an Absurdist Play . . . . .	69
 FOOTNOTES . . . . .	 106
 BIBLIOGRAPHY . . . . .	 118



## CHAPTER I

### ELEMENTS OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY THEATRE OF THE ABSURD

John Russell Taylor, the editor of the Penguin Dictionary of the Theatre, says that the dramatists of the theatre of the absurd share certain attitudes about the predicament of man in the universe. Taylor proceeds to say that this theatre diagnoses humanity's plight as purposelessness in an existence out of harmony with its surroundings, and, by such diagnosis, produces as a central theme a state of metaphysical anguish. Taylor rounds off his definition by saying that the movement of the theatre of the absurd seemed to have spent its force by 1962.

The theatre of the absurd, in that it represents the playwright's belief that the world is without certainty or purpose, chooses to demonstrate that the theatre which is this world's double is also without certainties or rigid classifications. Therefore the playwright experiments with his medium to find the most lucid way to convey to his audience the meaninglessness of existence. Samuel Beckett, in a fragment in the Addenda to Watt questions the impossibility of this chosen task of the modern artist:

who may tell the tale  
of the old man?  
weigh absence in a scale?  
mete want with a span?  
the sum assess  
of the world's woes?  
nothingness in words enclose?





- (1) DURRENMATT BELIEVES THAT PURE TRAGEDY IS NOT TO BE FOUND TODAY. COMIC AND TRAGIC ARE INEXTRICABLY MIXED.

Romulus: Once more and for the last time, let us play this comedy. Let us act as if final accounts were settled here on earth, as if the spirit won over the material called man.<sup>1</sup>

I have underlined the word "comedy" in the above quotation because it seems to me that in describing Romulus the Great or even the character Romulus as comic we are doing a disservice to the playwright unless we understand what Durrenmatt himself means when he sub-titles his play "An Historical Comedy without historic basis."<sup>2</sup> A definitive clue to his meaning is given in his essay, Problems of the Theatre, in which he defies the accepted theories of tragedy and comedy as derived from the corpus of "classical" drama: "Tragedy and comedy are but formal concepts, dramatic attitudes, figments of the aesthetic imagination which can embrace one and the same thing."<sup>3</sup> After explaining that there can be no pure tragedy in this "Punch-and-Judy show of our century" because "there are no more guilty and also, no responsible men," Durrenmatt asserts that the tragic is still possible:



We can achieve the tragic out of comedy. We can bring it forth as a frightening moment, as an abyss that opens suddenly; indeed many of Shakespeare's tragedies are already comedies out of which the tragic arises.<sup>4</sup>

Thus, Durrenmatt's plays are not a middle ground between tragedy and comedy; rather they exemplify the gratuitous womb from which either the tragic or the comic is born.

The body of the Romulus' quotation is also important in that it is a typical example of Durrenmatt's style of developing the comic from the serious; of giving the comic a tragic twist or vice versa; or, even blending the farcical and the serious in such a way that one must closely examine the resultant ambiguity.<sup>5</sup> Embodied in this short speech by Romulus to Odoaker are two of the central ideas of the play: one, the "material called man" is such that he works against the triumph of the spirit; and two, the control over "final accounts" lies in some nebulous area beyond man's grasp. By calling such a state a comedy Romulus speaks after the pattern established by his creator, Durrenmatt, who asserts that there are two possible reactions which one can give when he realizes "the senselessness, the hopelessness of this world": the man could, of course, despair, but,



. . . another answer would be not to despair, would be an individual's decision to endure this world in which we live like Gulliver among the giants. He also achieves distance, he also steps back a pace or two who takes measure of his opponent, who prepares himself to fight his opponent or to escape him. [Thus] It is still possible to show man as a courageous being.<sup>6</sup>

Romulus, at the end of the drama, is such a being; indeed, one is reminded of Camus' Sisyphus who, in spite of the complete lack of meaning in the universe, smiles as he defiantly and eternally pushes his rock up the mountain.

However, in terms of both the play and the playwright's notes appended to it, such an interpretation must be qualified. True, Romulus is courageous and willing for himself and the empire to be sacrificed to atone for the wrongs suffered by others at the hands of the Romans, but Durrenmatt does not fail to indict Romulus for his lack of effort to better the situation. Continually stressed throughout the play is Romulus' passive surrender come what may. He has simply limited his existence to that of the chicken-fancier (perhaps with the distinct aroma of "chicken" pervading all his actions). He sells off the culture of Rome to whomever will give enough money to buy chicken feed. He allows his people, some of whom are loyal to himself and to Rome, to suffer at the hands of the Germanic tribes.





Even his motives for protecting his daughter, Rea, are suspect. Does he refuse her marriage to Caesar Rupf because, as he says, "To remain loyal to a human being is greater and much more difficult than to remain loyal to a state"?<sup>7</sup> This would imply that he loves his daughter and appreciates her love for Emilian? Or does Romulus block the marriage because allowing Rupf to marry Rea would save the empire? Then his own marriage and his humanitarian schemes would be wasted? Durrenmatt does not answer this question. He does, however, delineate fairly closely the kind of "human" he wanted to portray Romulus as:

. . . a witty man, a man at ease and humane, but in the last analysis, a human being who proceeds with the utmost firmness and lack of consideration for others . . . a dangerous fellow. A man determined to die. That is the terror lying within this imperial chicken-fancier, this judge of the world disguised as a fool. His tragedy lies in the comedy of his end; instead of a sacrificial death he has earned for himself retirement.<sup>8</sup>

The opposites, "imperial" and "chicken-fancier", "judge" and "fool", are characteristic of the play's development from the first scene on.

When the curtain rises we see the bleeding military athlete, Spurius Titus Mamma, stumble on to the stage. It seems to be our nature to sympathize with any man who has endured the physical tribulations that Spurius





Titus Mamma has; Durrenmatt will not let us rest so easy. Through the lines of Achilles and Pyramus (who, instead of their usual heroic roles, are in this play two undifferentiated chamberlains), Durrenmatt immediately upsets our preconceptions and cliché feelings. Achilles and Pyramus are not at all impressed with the messenger; instead they denigrate the importance of any news from Pavia, chastise Spurius Titus Mamma for his "patriotism that conflicts with cultivated behavior", and finally advise him to

. . . go to the Lord High Steward. At ten o'clock sharp, two hours from now, he will hold audience. Add your name to the list of new arrivals. Request permission from the Minister of State to deliver an important message to the Imperial Court and perhaps then, in the course of the next few days, you may be able to deliver your news personally to the Emperor.<sup>9</sup>

Thus, by rendering the serious frivolous, Durrenmatt counters the stagnant effects of the museum-theatre in which he sees the public as having been "relieved of the task of thinking and of passing judgements other than those learned by rote in school."<sup>10</sup>

In similar scenes ranging throughout the play -- that in which Zeno pleads for asylum while Apollonius looks over the busts; or, the scene in which Emilian would give Rea to Caesar Rupf while chickens fly across the stage; or, the farcical assassination scene in which no less than nine potential assassins are discovered in



various uncomfortable hiding places; or, the ultimate twist where we await the death of Romulus only to find that Odoaker, the supposedly barbaric German commander, is in reality an even more cultured and peace-loving chicken-fancier than Romulus himself -- Durrenmatt continually catches his audience in the "mouse-trap" that is comedy as preparation for the serious intention of the play. He outsmarts his audience "into listening to things it would otherwise not so readily listen to"<sup>11</sup> -- that humanitarian ideals can be misplaced; that the backbone of history is violence and that any peaceful interim will be forgotten; that as long as people continue to love the Theodorics there is little hope for the future; that money is all-powerful, that "Every man has his price";<sup>12</sup> that humanity suffers under insoluble problems and yet man must accept the responsibility for betterment of his situation; that man's greatness is his tragedy.



(2) PINTER DEMONSTRATES THAT IN THE ABSURD WORLD ALL MEN ARE VICTIMS.

The primitive hostility of the world rises up to face us across the millennia. For a second we cease to understand it because for centuries we have understood in it solely the images and designs that we have attributed to it beforehand, because henceforth we lack the power to make use of that artifice. The world evades us because it becomes itself again . . . that density and that strangeness of the world is the absurd . . . [The] discomfort in the face of man's own inhumanity, this incalculable tumble before the image of what we are, this 'nausea' as a writer of today calls it, is also the absurd.<sup>13</sup>

What Pinter shows us in The Dumb Waiter is the absurd, partly as defined by Camus and partly as demonstrated by Kafka. In the course of the play Pinter demonstrates the essential loneliness of man even in the presence of a close friend or long-time colleague; the hostility of the inexplicable powers beyond man's reach or ken who, although having an all-powerful effect on man's destiny, are not at all influenced by man's impotent struggles with his pitiful tools of reason; the monotony, boredom and lifelessness left to man forced to live in subjection to these powers. All this Pinter does by extremely accurately reproducing on stage the world he lives in; for, as Martin Esslin says, "In a world that has become absurd it is enough to transcribe reality with meticulous care to create the impression of extravagant irrationality."<sup>14</sup>





Into the basement room with its two beds pushed flat against the wall and its two doors (one leading to the kitchen and lavatory, the other to "a passage"<sup>15</sup>), Pinter introduces two characters, known only as Ben and Gus, who we later discover are killers, and who are in the room to do a job for the organization that employs them. Any excitement we might expect about their job is allayed when their essential ordinariness is elaborated by their seemingly habitual and mechanical actions: reading the newspaper, tying and untying shoelaces, yawning, and going to the lavatory. The emptiness and monotony of their lives is emphasized by their exclamations over a newspaper's human interest story about an old man who crawled under a "stationary lorry" and was run over. The aimless banality of their speech gives the audience the feeling of eavesdropping on the neighbors. And the banality of all this is enhanced by the fact that Pinter treats any mystery there might be about the killers in the same way that we would treat them if we saw them on the street -- Pinter leaves their backgrounds very vague; questions such as who they are to kill, or even why they are going to do it, are left unanswered or partly answered in such a way as to give rise to further questions. As John Russell Taylor comments in The Rise and Fall of the





Well-made Play, Pinter's plays are "well-made drawing-room drama complete in every detail, even down to the meticulously realistic dialogue, except that its exposition is left out altogether."<sup>16</sup> Thus, the comic effect that blossoms for the while that we feel superior to the killers is, for the spectator, if he realized it, on a rather shaky foundation.

The serenity of the characters in the security of the room is at first shaken by trivialities: the lavatory has a "deficient ballcock" and will not flush, Gus is out of cigarettes, the beds do not have clean sheets, neither he nor Ben has the shilling necessary to get sufficient gas to make tea. They argue first about a penalty in a football game and then about the propriety of saying "light the gas" or "light the kettle".<sup>17</sup> When an order for food comes down on the hitherto unnoticed dumbwaiter, Ben and Gus give what food they have to try to satisfy whoever is above. The absurdity of the situation dawns upon us when we compare the exotic quality of the orders received and the barrenness of the resources called upon to fill them, and add this to the fact that neither Gus nor Ben has any idea who they are trying so hard to please. The epitome of the absurd is realized when Gus, upon returning from the lavatory, is confronted by Ben who has



probably received orders through the speaking tube attached to the dumbwaiter to kill him.

It seems, then, that Pinter's view of absurdity is similar to that envisioned by both Camus and Kafka. Like Camus' delineation of the absurd man, Pinter gives us Gus who is "fed up", who has begun to think ever since he and Ben made such a "mess" of the girl they killed on another job; Gus approaches the "awakening" that Camus says is born of weariness: Gus asks questions about the room, the organization, their job and their lives; he hollers up the dumbwaiter that "the larder is bare" which is really something of a revolt for one who is an "organization man." We feel that if Gus lived long enough he would eventually adopt Camus' ethic of "quantity"<sup>18</sup> and rebel in such a way as to make his existence meaningful to himself; indeed, he has the beginnings of the lucidly absurd man.

Pinter, however, by showing us that Gus is about to be killed, is less optimistic than Camus. Camus, even though he recognizes the hostility of the universe, says that man can feed his greatness on "the wine of the absurd and the bread of indifference"<sup>19</sup>; but not so, Pinter. Pinter, like Kafka before him, shows that man's indifference, like any other action he might conceive, is of no consequence. The absurd world is hostile and man must suffer. In the



absurd world there are neither heroes nor villains, there are only victims.

These victims, in both The Trial and The Dumb Waiter, never know who their accuser is, or, even the nature of the accusation. For every Gus or K. who wants to understand the strangeness of the world, there is at least one Ben who has the malicious power of the "organization" or the "court" behind him giving orders to have them killed. If we can assume that McCann and Goldberg of The Birthday Party are the counterparts of Ben and Gus in The Dumb Waiter, then the parallel with The Trial is reinforced: as Kafka has shown that the warders who arrest K. are subject to the punishment by the court's whipper<sup>20</sup>, so does Pinter show that the organization's henchmen are equally subject to motiveless punishment. We are forced to wonder how long Ben and Wilson will be obedient and when they will get the same treatment as Gus. As the warders, Franz and Willem, are whipped in a lumber room of the bank, so is Gus to be killed in the basement kitchen of a restaurant. As the warders' beating goes on without interruption, so is Gus stripped "of his jacket, waistcoat, tie, holster, and revolver" without anyone hearing the noises of a struggle. When we recall that the whipper says, "I refuse to be bribed. I am here to whip people,



and whip them I shall"<sup>21</sup>, we cannot help but think of Ben, the dumbwaiter and unquestioning servant, who admonishes Gus: "Stop wondering. You've got a job to do. Why don't you just do it and shut up?"<sup>22</sup> Both Kafka and Pinter see the humour as well as the horror inherent in the absurd.





- (3) ACTION IN BECKETT'S CREATED WORLD IS INCONCLUSIVE AND INCOMPLETE -- EQUIVOCAL. BECKETT'S REFUSAL TO MOVE HIS CHARACTERS IN SIGNIFICANT ACTION ELABORATES THE FUTILITY OF LIFE.

Yes, in this confusion one thing alone is clear.  
We are waiting for Godot to come --<sup>23</sup>

When Vladimir speaks the above lines, it is almost as if Beckett himself were speaking directly to the playgoers in whose minds there have been several questions since the curtain was raised in the first act: Where is the scene taking place? What time of year is it? Who are these two men and why are they here? and, most disturbing of all, who, or what, is Godot? Vladimir's statements seem to be the only answers that Beckett cares to give to any or all questions that the play engenders. True, we do learn more: about the place -- the road could be any road anywhere, it starts from nowhere and goes no particular place -- about the time -- as evidenced by the presence or absence of four or five leaves on a sort of a tree, we know that the first act takes place in either fall or winter and that the second (supposedly a day later) is in spring or summer -- about the characters -- they are two tramps and two travellers and a young boy who comes both days but is not the same boy; they all have extremely vague backgrounds and not much future -- about their motives -- they are simply there or just passing through



going nowhere; indeed, they are there blathering away the time because they have nothing else to do, and nowhere else to go -- about Godot -- he is something or somebody that one waits for. Such are the answers that Beckett gives us; information here has the simple Socratic effect of making us all the more aware of how much we do not know; as Vladimir and Estragon reiterate several times in the course of the play, "Nothing is certain [except that they are waiting for Godot and even this is often forgotten -- witness the many times that they remind each other of the reason that they are presently in this particular stretch of the otherwise meaningless world.] "24

In the struggle that is existence for Vladimir/Didi/Mr. Albert, and Estragon/Gogo/Adam there is from the very first line, "Nothing to be done." Estragon, while spending the night in a ditch ("(Without gesture). Over there")<sup>25</sup>, has received a beating at the hands of persons unknown (the Twentieth Century "they"?). Even his friend, Didi, is not sympathetic; it is as if they speak on two different wave lengths, neither absorbing what the other says. Vladimir can only think how they should have jumped "Hand in hand from the top of the Eiffel Tower" back in the nineties, "a million years ago," when they were respectable and the equivocally impersonal and all-powerful



"they" would have allowed them to go "up".<sup>26</sup> After a brief argument about who suffers the most, and when Vladimir realizes that Estragon was unresponsive to his suicidal line of thought, Vladimir suggests another possibility:

Suppose we repented.  
 Estragon: Repented what?  
 Vladimir: Oh . . . (He reflects). We wouldn't have to go into the details.  
 Estragon: Our being born.<sup>27</sup>

The speeches are typical of all of those of the two "time servers"; their thoughts are always divergent whether or not they begin on the same plane; whatever the line of thought, it is always inconclusive and incomplete. Also illustrated in these lines is the nature of the decisions and action of the tramps -- they would like to repent without going into the details (either because the details would be painful or, because they have been forgotten). A particularly lucid example of this tendency of theirs to forget necessary details is to be found in their reflections on a sometime earlier meeting with Godot: they only know that Godot told them to wait by the tree but they are not certain that what they are waiting by is a tree, or a bush, or a shrub; Vladimir recalls that Godot "didn't say for sure that he'd come"<sup>28</sup>; Vladimir thinks that it was Saturday that they were to wait, but, Estragon asks, "What Saturday? And is it





Saturday? Is it not rather Sunday? Or Monday? Or Friday? . . . Or Thursday?"<sup>29</sup> (it is implied that they were already there the day before); they recall that what they asked Godot for was "nothing very definite. A kind of prayer . . . A vague supplication,"<sup>30</sup> and, that Godot replied, "That he couldn't promise anything. That he'd have to think it over"<sup>31</sup>; finally, neither of the two is even certain that "his" name is Godot -- when Estragon asks, Vladimir can only reply, "I think so."<sup>32</sup> In spite of the dubiety of all this, they agree to wait on. Vladimir equivocally informs us of the reason behind their decision, "Tied to Godot! What an idea! No question of it! (Pause). For the moment."<sup>33</sup> Thus they remain, for the duration of the play, in that state of action (waiting) that is inaction.

The arbitrary character of this main action is mirrored in both the language and the minor actions of the plot. Language between the characters, instead of serving its normally communicative function, has been relegated to the status of a game to alleviate the boredom of semi-action. The language game has several variations: the two tramps question and abuse each other; they have mock and insignificant arguments; each comforts the other in order to comfort himself; they blather; they produce genetic





word plays; or, each talks to himself. Thus one is tempted to say that their speech is unimportant and to agree with Vladimir that "This is becoming really insignificant."<sup>34</sup> One must avoid this though, because in the most seemingly meaningless speech in the play -- Lucky's thinking -- there is to be found a significant variation on the theme. Lucky baldly states the feelings common to all the characters about their meaningless existences and possibilities for salvation:

Given the existence as uttered forth in the public works of Puncher and Wattman of a personal God . . . with white beard . . . outside time without extension who from the heights of divine apathia divine athambia divine aphasia loves us dearly with some exceptions for reasons unknown but time will tell . . . causes some to be plunged in torment plunged in fire . . .<sup>35</sup>

In the same way that the characters practically say nothing, so do they do nothing: they offer help but fail to give it; they half-heartedly attempt suicide, they threaten Godot's messenger but fail to chase him; they agree to go but do not move as the curtain falls. Pozzo and Lucky's action is a variation of this semi-action: they go only to return; they go on until they fall, they wait and then they go on again; Pozzo promises the tramps a reward but gives them nothing; Lucky dances a net-like struggle; Pozzo drives Lucky on a journey that has no apparent goal.

Thus, the entire play is an imitation of the



equivocal action that waiting is. Waiting is the middle state between doing nothing and doing something.



- (4) MAN, BEFORE ACTING, EXPERIENCES THE CONDITION THAT KIERKEGAARD CALLS DREAD.

. . . man is not to be defined as a 'reasoning animal', or as a 'social' one, but as a free being, entirely indeterminate, who must choose his own being when confronted with certain necessities, such as being already committed in a world full of both threatening and favorable factors among other men who have made their choices before him, who have decided in advance the meaning of those factors. He is faced with the necessity of having to work and die, of being hurled into a life already complete which yet is his own enterprise and in which he can never have a second chance; where he must play his cards and take risks no matter what the cost.<sup>36</sup>

Much of Sartre's play, Huis Clos, consists of verbal and imaginary flashbacks by which the audience learns some of the pertinent facts (not necessarily the motives) behind the lives of three characters who never lived; who chose to be either "reasoning" or "social" animals rather than "free beings"; who, by refusing to "play their cards" because of fear of the cost, had crossed the boundary from life to death, described by the character Inez, long before they physically died. For all three, Garcin, Estelle, and Inez, life had been a perpetual impasse, and, ironically, physical death does not provide them with an exit, a way out of their impasses. Instead of an exit from the responsibility for their choices not to choose, Hell reflects -- even though there are no actual mirrors in Hell -- the consequences of existing only as objects in the consciousness of others; each character is condemned to be



what the other two think he is. Such is at least one aspect of the impasse, as the original French title and the various English translations -- No Exit, In Camera, Behind Closed Doors, Vicious Circle -- indicate. It is thus clear that the impasse was considered by Sartre as one of those situations "that are most common to human experience . . . [that] occur at least once in the majority of lives"<sup>37</sup>, and hence are worthy of exploration in the medium of drama.

It is not that the characters had never acted on Earth; they have acted but just enough to earn them some kind of definition by others that they would like not to have to accept: Garcin is a coward and a cruel husband, he is responsible for his wife's death as well as his own; Inez is a lesbian who, because of her conviction that she was a "damned bitch" and her enjoyment of the suffering of others, has caused three deaths; Estelle, even though she has always depended on others to define her and was at all times only "half-conscious"<sup>38</sup>, is guilty of the deaths of both her child and her lover. Each character comes to hell with certain preconceptions about the torments and punishments they will have to face. They are all surprised to learn that the only torments are eternal consciousness (or, more accurately for them, self-consciousness) with no





sleep and no "happy little dreams", no death and no escape by any two from the gaze of the third. There is no way that they can hide from their pasts, they are forced to be stripped naked to the gaze of the others who refuse to give the pity, love, or thrills that they demand to hide from what they are. As Inez says, "each of us will act as torturer of the two others."<sup>39</sup> There is no way out of the deadlock as long as each dreads the opinion of the others; as long as their own image is formed by other people it is completely out of reach, their acts cannot create their freedom and they are in hell and "Hell is -- other people."<sup>40</sup>

Estelle avoids responsibility most blatantly: she does not want to hear the word dead so suggests that they refer to themselves as "absentees"; she does not want to tell her story because she is afraid of what she will be if the others know the truth; she does not even want to accept the facts about the others, she cares only that Garcin is a man. Garcin's search for the reasons behind his cowardice, his desire to put his "life in order", is mere rationalization to avoid the fact that he could not be the tough pacifist journalist whose role he played in the presence of his friends; he pleads that he died too soon, that he needs more time to do his deeds in



order to define himself. Inez informs him that one always dies too soon and that a man is the sum total of the acts of his life and nothing else. Yet, Inez herself is as guilty as the other two. Her fatalistic acceptance of having to pay the price is paradoxically a shifting of the need for action onto someone or something else:

We are criminals -- murderers -- all three of us. We are in hell, my pets, they never make mistakes, and people aren't damned for nothing . . . We've had our hour of pleasure, haven't we? There have been people who have burnt their lives out for our sakes -- and we chuckled over it. So now we have to pay the reckoning.<sup>41</sup>

But even this is not the full extent of the impasse as explored by Sartre.

George Price, in explaining the nature of Kierkegaard's concept of dread, incidentally points the way for a fuller understanding of Huis Clos; the dread need not be surface or psychologically explainable dread:

Behind the act lies nothing! Innocency, as it reflects 'dreamingly' about itself, is clouded by a premonition about existence, the presentiment of a 'something which is nothing' but which is yet haunting and indefinable. The prohibition of God [or others] sharpens it, and Adam is suddenly alarmed at the disturbing possibility of 'being able'. Kierkegaard repeatedly states that it is alarm at the newly revealed possibilities of action and freedom that is awakened, and not desire. (The voices of God, the Tempter and Eve belong only to the inner drama of his 'dreaming' consciousness: they are its objectifications.)



What Adam is able to do, he does not know. 'There is only the possibility of being able, as a heightened expression of dread, because this in a more profound sense is and is not, because in a more profound sense he loves it and flees from it.' Adam is giddy on the pinnacle of freedom -- and he both loves and hates the experience. In this trembling moment he falls.

Behind the first sin lies neither radical evil nor the devil but simply dread.<sup>42</sup>

Adam's state of being "giddy on the pinnacle of freedom", I take to be an extremely lucid metaphor of the impasse. A similar giddiness is noticeable in Huis Clos when the door of hell swings open and offers Garcin, Estelle and Inez new possibilities of freedom and action. That the "long silence" following the door's opening is probably intended to show the characters' collective inability to act, is reinforced by Garcin's musing on "why that door opened" and his flat statement that he will not go, by Estelle's failure to move and by Inez's begging to stay. All the things they seem free to do -- staying, going, throwing one or even two others out -- are seen by the audience, in this situation as impossible. This time we must accept Inez's fatalistic interpretation of the scene: "The barrier's down, why are we waiting? . . . But what a situation! It's a scream! We're . . . inseparables."<sup>43</sup> Both the fact that the characters do not know what is beyond the door, and Garcin's assertion that he is staying because Inez knows what it is to be a coward, are only





partial explanations; the real explanation, if it could be called such, is dread. We can now reconcile Sartre's assertion that one does not get a second chance with the seeming second chance in Huis Clos: there really was no second chance in Huis Clos because the characters did not truly have another chance to act; people must suffer in impasses when suddenly confronted with hitherto unthought of possibilities for action, choice and definition. Sartre's ultimate condemnation of his characters is as summarily arbitrary as Kierkegaard felt that man's first sin was.





- (5) HAMLET IS NOT A TRAGEDY BUT A METAPLAY. METATHEATRE REFLECTS A WORLD DEVOID OF ABSOLUTES. PETER WEISS' MARAT-SADE, FOR EXAMPLE, IS A METAPLAY THAT EQUATES THE STAGE AND THE WORLD.

Without tragedy, of which we may be incapable, there is no philosophic alternative to the two concepts by which I have defined the metaplay: the world is a stage, life is a dream.<sup>44</sup>

The Persecution and Assassination of Jean-Paul Marat as Performed by the Inmates of the Asylum of Charenton Under the Direction of the Marquis de Sade<sup>45</sup> exemplifies, for the critic at least, both concepts -- the first straightforwardly, the second subtly (but, nonetheless acutely). In Marat-Sade the lines between the theatre and its double, the world, are blurred. The blurring effect is furthered by many things, not the least of which are the placing of the scene within a scene, and having a representative audience, Monsieur Coulmier and his family, on the stage for the entire play. By making the play within the play more than merely a structural device, a reflector of the main action, or a metaphor, Weiss interweaves the real world of the audience for his play with the world of the stage audience of Sade's play, and hence with Sade's created world in the Asylum of Charenton's bath hall.

Lionel Abel points out in Metatheatre that one of the qualities of a metaplay such as Hamlet is that "there



is hardly a scene in which some character is not trying to dramatize another. Almost every important character acts at some moment like a playwright employing a playwright's consciousness of drama to impose a certain posture or attitude on another."<sup>46</sup> Weiss makes it unmistakably clear that most of what we see on stage is a product of the shaping imagination of the Marquis de Sade. The figure of Sade looms over the action from the raising of the curtain to reveal him "making last-minute preparations for the entry of the actors,"<sup>47</sup> to the moment when the curtain is about to fall and we see him standing "upright on his chair, laughing triumphantly" as the inmates, "at the mercy of their mad marchlike dance",<sup>48</sup> are violently struck down by the baton-wielding nurses.

Moreover, as Abel suggests, "almost every important character" demonstrates a theatrical consciousness.<sup>49</sup> All of the actors in Weiss' play have at least double roles. Marat, the activist, is played by a paranoic -- he is a willing participant in Sade's drama but sometimes, when the mood should be most intense, he forgets his lines. Charlotte Corday, the Herald says, "has sleeping sickness, also melancholia,"<sup>50</sup> (Weiss says that she moves like a "scmnambulist"<sup>51</sup>); she too forgets her lines; she is a reluctant participant -- she falls asleep and holds



up the action of the play until the nurses, or her lover, Duperret, rouse her. The part of Duperret is given to an erotomaniac who most willingly takes part in the play because of the opportunities it provides for him to fondle and grab the delicious body of Corday, (he is forever being pulled away from her by the nurses). Roux, the former priest and radical socialist, is played by a strait-jacketed inmate; he has lost most of his lines to the censor's cut; he can only speak unexpectedly when he can force his words to be heard before Coulmier can order the nurses to shut him up: Roux directly addresses the audience at the end of both the play within the play and the play proper. Coulmier acts as prologue, censor, interjector for the people, and, audience. Sade himself acts as prompter, stage director, director and actor. Giving each actor two roles is but a part of the technique that Weiss uses to achieve what Brecht called the "alienation effect" (so much admired by Abel), that causes "the spectator [to] adopt an attitude of inquiry and criticism in his approach to the incident."<sup>52</sup>

On the whole, Weiss refuses, as did Brecht, to put the audience in a trance, to "give it the illusion of watching an ordinary unrehearsed event."<sup>53</sup> But, it is





also Weiss' practice to create his characters as Shakespeare did Hamlet -- Abel found Hamlet admirable because "he is one of the first characters to be free of his author's contrivances."<sup>54</sup> Weiss makes all of the characters free of Sade's contrivances at one time or another: Corday is free to fall asleep when she pleases -- the Herald suggests that she might even sleep through the time when she is supposed to kill Marat -- she possesses a knife before the buying of it has been mimed to the audience; Roux is free, not only of Sade's direction, but also of the censor's cuts; the Herald several times speaks ostensibly to the Coulmiers but indirectly to the theatre audience; Marat can ask, "Why does everything sound false?"<sup>55</sup>; even a minor character like Cucurucu can bring the focus from the incidents in Sade's play to the 1808 scene as when he comments, "Wish we could" in response to Duperret's observation that Marat has only "Pickpockets layabouts parasites/who loiter in the boulevards/and hang around the cafes"<sup>56</sup> on his side; Sade himself is free to step in and out of his prescribed role as director to argue philosophically with Marat; finally, when the play within the play is over, instead of the intended therapeutic effect, the inmates are transformed into a revolutionary mob. They are free of all Sade's contrivances. It is this unexpected spontaneity that keeps





the audience interested at the same time that the necessary distance is maintained to keep us from identifying with the characters or sympathetically losing ourselves in the arguments of either Marat or Sade. As Abel says about plays of this kind, they "make us feel concerned for characters who tell us frankly that they were invented to make us feel concerned . . ." <sup>57</sup> but, not so concerned that we can forget the discomfort they cause when they force us to question our absolute presuppositions about the strong black line dividing the stage from life, or that dividing productions of the imagination from reality.

Peter Weiss, however, goes beyond Brecht by giving us what might be described as "total theatre"; he strenuously employs all the theatrical elements at his disposal. He gives us a narrator harlequin one of whose functions is to comment ironically, not only on the action of the play within the play, but, also on Coulmier's interjections. Song, dance, mime, gesture, audio and visual effects are all geared both to sharpen the audience's perception of the action, and to emphasize the unreality of the stage world that is our world's double. He catches us in the trammel net of metatheatre and leaves us feeling that there are neither absolute values nor absolute solutions to human problems.



- (6) REVERSAL IS THE FUNDAMENTAL FEATURE OF GENET'S  
 DRAMA BECAUSE IT IS THE BASIS OF HIS WORLD-VIEW.

The Balcony is a brothel whose clients arrive equipped, in Madam Irma's phrase, 'each with his own scenario.' Surely this identifies the drama as a metaplay.<sup>58</sup>

After having more or less arbitrarily forced Genet's play, The Balcony, to fit his definition of the metaplay, Mr. Abel proceeds to attack the playwright for his desire to write tragedy rather than metatheatre:

And the sentimental inclination toward something impossible for him [i.e. tragedy] is responsible, I believe, for the one bad scene in The Balcony, a scene almost fatal to the second half of the play, lasting for almost an hour and boring from beginning to end. Having absorbed the revolution with its insistence on reality into the illusionist world of The Great Balcony, Genet suddenly reverses himself and tries to see illusion itself as inexorable. But this is an impossible idea, contrary to all dramatic judgement or good sense: it may be our fate to have illusions; this does not mean that illusion can have the same force as fate. Or to put the matter better, fate might free us from illusions, but is probably itself illusory. This is more or less what Genet has said throughout his play, but at the very end he seems to want to say the contrary . . . The Chief of Police wants to be apotheosized and as a phallus. He achieves this grandiose aim when a client (none other than the very revolutionary who had wanted to keep the revolution real), pretending to be the Chief of Police, castrates himself. The episode is brutal, vulgar, and utterly undramatic. Should illusion also have sacrifices, martyrs?<sup>59</sup>

It seems to me that, if the play does not function under the elaboration of a theory such as Abel's, it might be the theory, rather than the play, which demonstrates "weak thinking."<sup>60</sup> I would suggest that the scene that Abel describes, instead of being "the one bad scene in



The Balcony," is the high point of an intricate pattern of reversals which structures the entire play. Abel himself notices that Genet "reverses himself", but being so bound to the cliché explication of illusion and reality, Abel cannot see this reversal as anything but a fault.

Without thinking myself magnificently born, the uncertainty of my origin allowed me to interpret it. I added to it the peculiarity of my misfortunes. Abandoned by my family, I already felt it was natural to aggravate this condition by my preference for boys, and this preference by theft, and theft by crime or a complacent attitude in regard to crime. I thus resolutely rejected a world which had rejected me. This almost gleeful rushing into the most humiliating situations is perhaps still motivated by my childhood imagination . . .<sup>61</sup>

I suspect that Genet's ability to capitalize on the most adverse conditions, to reject the world that rejects him, to reverse a situation in order to develop its fullness, is characteristic of his art as well as his life. He exploits all the visible and audible effects of the theatre in the opening of The Balcony to make us feel the dignity and pomp of the "sacristy". The "larger than life" Bishop (who wears the tragedian's cothurni and has padded shoulders), "in miter and gilded cope"<sup>62</sup> sits fervently pontificating on the role of a prelate. The reflection of the unmade bed causes only a vague feeling of uneasiness because the speech of the Bishop is convincing: However, Genet will not allow us to be all





the way taken in; before the Bishop can convince us of his reality, Madam Irma admonishes him about the "deal" and cautions him not to break anything. We realize that the Bishop is not a Bishop; that the sacristy is a "house of illusions"; that we have just witnessed a travesty of a penitent's blessing, confession and absolution. And we understand why the Bishop insists that the doors be "firmly closed, shut, buttoned, laced, hooked, sewn . . ."<sup>63</sup> In this scene we also see how Genet uses what might be described as metaphorical definition: the Bishop says that "our [the collective one] holiness lies only in our being able to forgive you your sins. Even if they're only make-believe"<sup>64</sup>; such definition from the outside is common in all of Genet's writing -- one becomes what one is forced to become, religion exists only because sin is everywhere, the judge exists only because crime and the criminal exist. Like Genet himself, his characters defile the things that are most important to them: the Bishop affirms the beauty of "Bishop" by denying the function ("F..k the function"<sup>65</sup>) while affirming that it is a "mode of being. It's a trust. A burden. Miters, lace, gold-cloth and glass trinkets, genuflections."<sup>66</sup> In order to destroy the function of Bishop he wants "to cause a scandal and feel you up, you





slut, you bitch, you trollop, you tramp . . ."67 A similar defilement of the function is to be found in the would-be judge's prostration of himself at the feet of the thief. The idea of defilement of the function is what keeps them from becoming the real personages. They no longer need to stipulate that there must be something false about the scenarios. (As Irma says, "They all want everything to be as true as possible . . . Minus something indefinable, so that it won't be true."68) Then they can be transformed by a suggestion, such as that of the Envoy, into the men who play the roles in public and accept the responsibilities of the function. Their travesties, however, also show their reverence for the figures they imitate: the re-reversal lies in the fact that the bawdy-house imitators are truer moralists than the leaders in the society; Genet himself emerges as a highly moralistic playwright (even though the morals are inversions of the usually accepted ones.)

By setting the action of the brothel within the context of a revolution against the principles of the established order (as epitomized in The Grand Balcony), Genet sets up mirrors for both the establishment and the revolution. Roger, one of the leaders of the revolution wants to destroy all sham and illusion; he despises make-



believe and cautions his followers accordingly: "If we behave like those on the other side, then we are the other side. Instead of changing the world, all we'll achieve is a reflection of the one we want to destroy"<sup>69</sup>; he recognizes how simply movements can be reversed.

Roger's principles embody what might be expected in a revolution against an establishment built on illusion but Genet surprises us when he shows Roger, the rational realist, to be an impossible dreamer. A foreshadowing of Roger's coming reversal is given in the comment of Louis, another revolutionary:

You're dreaming. Dreaming of an impossible revolution that's carried out reasonably and cold-bloodedly. You're fascinated by it, the way those in the other camp are by other games. But you've got to realize that the most reasonable man always manages, when he pulls the trigger, to become a dispenser of justice.<sup>70</sup>

We see here one of the best examples of the way Genet uses the twist of reversal to equate opposites.

Ironically, Roger himself provides the revolutionaries with their principal escape from the realistic percepts that he envisions. By stealing Chantal from the House of Illusions, he had hoped to recreate her in a realistic role; the revolutionaries insist that she become a symbol, a necessary part of the illusion that makes men fight. (Thus, incidentally, the fate of Chantal has been re-reversed: she escaped from the scenarios of



Madam Irma hoping to be free from illusions only to become once again the central figure in someone else's make-believe. She ends as a Saint -- this ending of course seems to be a reversal from the role of prostitute, but is, in Genet's system, at least, a kind of equation.) As Roger predicted, the revolution is doomed to be a reflection of the old order; its success is failure, but it could not succeed without illusion; Genet shows the incapacity of any order to survive without the life-giving element, sham; at the same time, though, he condemns the necessity of sham.

With the revolution's success-failure (in that it gets rid of the representatives of the establishment but not the functions, rather it strengthens the functions for the new actors in the roles of Bishop, Judge, General, and Queen) the bawdy-house imitators, and the madam, take on the second bodies (i.e. the political bodies) of the double-bodied<sup>71</sup> functionaries who have been removed. We would expect the would-be functionaries, now become the genuine leaders, to be happy. They are not, of course; the Bishop defines their dissatisfaction: "Our ornamental purity, our luxurious and barren -- and sublime -- appearance has been eaten away."<sup>72</sup> In another reversal, however, he also asserts that they have become the embodiment





of the ideals of Roger's revolution: "We're going to live in the light, but with all that that implies.

We -- magistrate, soldier, prelate -- we're now going to act in such a way as to impoverish these ornaments and dignities unceasingly. We're going to render them useful."<sup>73</sup> (This is, by the way, the same man who said, "F..k the function.") The all-powerful Chief of Police, however, puts down this rebellion too.

The Chief of Police, for the almost infinite series of reversals and peripeteias in his character, is worth special comment. Before we see him, he is defined by the Bishop as a "wretched incompetent"<sup>74</sup>; by the Judge as "Twiddling his thumbs, as usual."<sup>75</sup> When the Chief of Police comes to Irma's we learn that she has had to take a lover, Arthur, in order to make up for the Chief's lack of virility. He is unable to stop the revolution, but he emerges as the Hero when it succeeds/fails. He wants to build an empire so that the empire will, in exchange, build him. The revolution that was intended to remove him results in his joining the "nomenclature" as a phallus (a reversal of the fact that he no longer performs sexually with Irma?). Roger, his counterpart, creates the role of Chief of Police in the Grand Balcony, but he adds to the role when he magically castrates the Chief of Police. This castration is a re-reversal in that the



Chief of Police still has his "balls" even though they are of no use to him; it is thus a re-assertion of sham vitality, a sham castration. He descends into the tomb to live; he has become a role. As Irma says, "Glory means descending into the grave with tons of victuals!"<sup>76</sup>

Inasfar, then, as Genet is presenting his audience with a "comedy of a comedy, . . . a reflection of a reflection"<sup>77</sup>, The Balcony employs both concepts by which Mr. Abel defines the metaplay: "the world is a stage, life is a dream."<sup>78</sup> But a reflection is also a reversal; a reflection of a reflection is a reversed reflection, a re-reversal; Genet, therefore, goes beyond metatheatre. He shows us that what is traditionally recognized as false is true, and hence, false, ad infinitum. Genet is not, then, saying that "illusion can have the same force as fate", rather he is showing that the false, the illusory is all there is. The cyclical reversals and re-reversals of the play are not a reversion to a search for reality, they are simply the essence of the development of the idea that there is no reality, just sham. The true paradox lies in the fact that life lies in role-playing, yet as soon as one accepts a role, he refuses the possibility of life and dies. When Arthur becomes the corpse that he is supposed to be playing,



there is no value in the performance. When the Chief of Police becomes a part of the nomenclature, all that is left for him is to retire into the tomb; he cannot, indeed does not even want to, live; immortality is reversed and becomes simply death. We can now answer Abel's question -- "Should illusion also have sacrifices, martyrs?" -- sacrifices and martyrs have always been for illusion, and for illusion only. We can also now see why the major theme of the scenarios, which seemed to the imitators to be the source of life, is death.

Irma's is the final reversal: she goes from Queen back to Madam of the House of Illusions, from Madam to an actress on the stage speaking directly to the audience. So the play ends with Irma's reversal accompanying the sounds of machine-gun fire in the new revolution. She says, . . . You must now go home, where everything -- you can be quite sure -- will be even falser than here . . . You must go now. You'll leave by the right through the alley . . . (She extinguishes the last light.) It's morning already.<sup>79</sup>





- (7) GEORGE WILLIAMSON CALLS THE AMBIVALENT STATE OF MIND OFTEN EXPRESSED IN METAPHYSICAL VERSE OF THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY "METAPHYSICAL SHUDDER." TWENTIETH CENTURY ABSURDIST THEATRE CHARACTERISTICALLY EVOKES AN ANALOGOUS EMOTION.

In a special sense the Donne tradition holds an anxious interest for our age: it represents the poetry of that past age which was most like our own. Then, as now, poetry felt its beliefs crumbling beneath it. The problem of achieving order out of chaos lay heavily upon its music . . . . Scepticism was cooling the youthful blood of the Renaissance, equivocation was slipping an interval between the mind and the senses, while disillusion was poisoning the emotions and sapping the vital force . . . .

In Donne's poetry it is first the lady's shoe, and then the starry heavens; but always there is an actually realized object before him. The object may be death, and his zest may be savage or terrible; but the object of the verse will be as actually realized and the zest as intense as the shroud which he wore for his last portrait.<sup>80</sup>

It seems to me that the qualities and sensations Williamson describes as characteristic of both ages are indeed real ones. If such is truly the case, then we should be able to recognize at least some similarities in the works of the Metaphysical poets of the seventeenth century and those of the "metaphysical" playwrights of the Twentieth. One rather striking similarity can be seen in what Williamson calls the "Metaphysical shudder".

Williamson says of the metaphysical shudder that it is a "quality of emotion . . . peculiar to the





Metaphysical mode of thought"; that it is "difficult to analyze, but, once felt, it can never be forgotten."<sup>81</sup>

In exploring its nature further Williamson quotes Donne's line--"A bracelet of bright haire about the bone" -- as exemplifying the metaphysical shudder in its most compact form. He goes on to explain the source of power behind the line:

Chiefly by means of the conceit the Metaphysical poets gave their thinking and feeling connections with the strange, unearthly, and terrible nebula of emotion which surrounds our life and bewilders us in the daily papers. Because of this magic we see Donne's 'bracelet of bright haire about the bone' under an almost unearthly light, and shudder at the strangeness of so simple a thing. These poets were masters at releasing some plangent suggestion that communicates an effect of terror to even slight emotions.<sup>82</sup>

If we can judge from the public reaction (a sample of which will be included later) accorded the play upon its first performance, there is little doubt that in Saved there is once again being communicated the "effect of terror."

However, before proceeding with an analysis of the metaphysical shudders emanating from Edward Bond's play, I would like, by way of explanation, to try to allay part of the "difficulty" mentioned by Williamson regarding the analysis of the emotion. In Metaphysics, a book of philosophical essays published ten years after Williamson's study of Donne, R.G. Collingwood points out that we all



hold certain "absolute presuppositions" about which we tend to be "rather ticklish, to say the least"<sup>83</sup> when these are exposed or interfered with. Absolute presuppositions are things we take for granted to which the distinction between truth and falsehood does not apply; they "are never propounded at all . . . their business is to be presupposed."<sup>84</sup> Collingwood explains, in a note to his fifth chapter, that

People are not ordinarily aware of their absolute presuppositions, and are not, therefore, thus [sic] aware of changes in them; such a change, therefore, cannot be a matter of choice. Nor is there anything superficial or frivolous about it. It is the most radical change that a man can undergo, and entails the abandonment of all his most firmly established habits and standards of action.<sup>85</sup>

I find implied here the idea that if people are made aware of their presuppositions, and hence, of an alternative, then change could conceivably become a matter of choice. I would suggest then that the metaphysical shudder is at least in part the product of someone's or something's having shaken us in our rather complacent unawareness. I would further suggest that the task the modern dramatist has undertaken is to explore and disentangle our absolute presuppositions; not only to make us conscious of their existence, (perhaps to reinforce them, perhaps to cause us to make some conscious effort to change them) but, at



the very least, to make us face them and their consequences.

Williamson quotes from "To His Coy Mistress" the following lines as proof that Marvell "knew 'the fever of the bone' and could communicate the shudder with his metaphysical surprise"<sup>86</sup>:

But at my back I alwaies hear  
Times winged Charriot hurrying near:  
And yonder all before us lye  
Desarts of vast Eternity . . .  
The grave's a fine and private place  
But none I think do there embrace.

It should not be too difficult to see that Edward Bond can also communicate the shudder in such a passage as this:

Rock a bye baby on a tree top  
When the wind blows the cradle will rock  
When the bough breaks the cradle will fall  
And down will come baby and cradle and tree  
an' bash its little brains out an' dad'll scoop  
'em up and use 'em for bait.<sup>87</sup>

Although the poetic quality of the two passages is not at all equal, their effect is similar: the serenity of the first lines is abruptly changed by the harshness or levity of the last; we are prepared to be comforted but instead are treated to an austere (though perhaps exaggerated) shock of reality. Barry's lines are representative of the technique that Edward Bond employs to achieve the shudder: he shows us what we expect but always with something added that causes us to later





question not only our social ideas but our feelings about the nature of the human animal, man.

The range of absolute presuppositions that Bond disentangles for our analysis stretches all the way from the most trivial and relatively simple idea that it is just for a man who is late for work to have his pay packet docked, to the most closely cherished feelings about the value of such long-established institutions as parenthood and marriage. Thus Edward Bond's play, although at first easily recognizable as a biting exposé of the physical, and cultural, and emotional indigence of modern industrial society, also explores the meta-physical ramifications of man's living in the twentieth century.

When Pam and Len come on the stage and none too subtly inform the audience that they have just met -- they do not even know each other's names -- and are now going to have intercourse on the sofa (because the bed is not made), we might be shocked whether or not we are pruriently interested in what they are doing. The shock, if it is there, is intensified by such exchanges as,

LEN: Yer got a fair<sup>88</sup> ' arse.

PAM: Like your mug.<sup>88</sup>

Or, LEN: Reckon 'e [Pam's father.] saw?  
PAM: Shouldn't be surprised.<sup>89</sup>



Or, LEN: 'Oo else yer got knockin' about? Yer ain't  
stuffed yer granny under the sofa?  
PAM: She's dead.<sup>90</sup>

Or, the travesty they enact of the sexual act:

LEN: Less give 'im a thrill.  
(He jumps noisily on the couch.)  
Cor - blimey!  
PAM: You're terrible!

(He takes some sweets from her bag.)  
They're my sweets.  
LEN: Less 'ave a choose.  
(Loudly,)  
'Ow's that for size?  
PAM: What yer shoutin?  
LEN (he puts a sweet in her mouth): Go easy! Yer  
wanna make it last!

(She laughs. He bites a sweet in half and looks  
at it.)

Oo, yer got a lovely little soft centre.

(Aside to PAM): First time I seen choclit round it!

(He jumps on the sofa.)  
PAM (shrill): Yer awful!  
LEN: That still 'ard?  
PAM (laughs): Leave off!  
LEN: Come on, there's plenty more where that come  
from.

(He puts a sweet in her mouth.)

PAM (splutters): Can't take no more!  
LEN: Yeh - open it. Yer can do a bit more!  
PAM: Ow!  
LEN: Oorr lovely!  
(He tickles her. She chokes.)  
This'll put 'airs on yer chest!

(They try to laugh quietly. The door opens.  
HARRY puts his head in. He goes out. He shuts  
the door. LEN calls):  
'Ave a toffee!<sup>91</sup>



Here Edward Bond gives us lasting impressions of three of the most important characters of the play by showing us their pathetic human inadequacy in a startlingly humorous way. In doing this, he sets up for analysis and attack such privileged presuppositions as our feelings about the way that "ladies" should speak and be spoken to, respect of parents by children, the privacy of the sex act, social amenities between the sexes, and, possibly, the belief that all classes, the lower classes not excepted, have middle class values.

In the course of the play Edward Bond elicits something like the metaphysical shudder many more times by touching upon various other absolute presuppositions, but never so thoroughly and deeply as in Scene Six from the moment that Pam brings the aspirin-drugged bastard baby into the park, until the moment when she cooingly and unknowingly removes the infant from the place where it has been stoned to death. It is bad enough when the young toughs use the pram as a battering ram. But this initial shock is small compared to the progressively more sadistic harassments they invent for the baby to suffer. They pull "its" hair; pinch it, remove its nappies and "Gob its crutch"; suggest that they "piss on it"; intimate that its fingers would be easily broken;





punch it; rub its feces in its face; and, finally throw both stones and lighted matches at it.<sup>92</sup> (It is noteworthy that the suspected father, Fred, throws the first stone -- "Let him who is without sin cast the first stone.") The entire action is put forth as enjoyable for the young men; it is not why they enjoy it, but the fact that they do, that increases the force of the metaphysical shudder even more. Yet we must be careful not to dismiss too quickly these men as psychopaths, or to respond to the scene as mere sadism far-removed from ourselves or anything we might do.

Edward Bond himself advises us in his notes that,

. . . the stoning to death of the a [sic] baby in a London park is a typical English understatement. Compared to the 'strategic' bombing of German towns it is a negligible atrocity, compared to the cultural and emotional deprivation of most of our children its consequences are insignificant.<sup>93</sup>

We cannot deny that Edward Bond has found an extremely effective dramatic method to put his idea across.

If we recall Collingwood's reminder that "In Modern Europe absolute presuppositions are unfashionable," and that "when an Absolute presupposition is touched, the invitation [to examine it] will be rejected, even with a certain degree of violence,"<sup>94</sup> then we can see that this is the effect that Edward Bond has promoted in such a person as Mary V. Thom who wrote the following letter





upon the play's publication in Plays and Players:

. . . I now write in severe protest about the disgusting, filthy pornographic sadism which appeared in the January issue under the title Saved by Edward Bond.

As a committee member of the National Council of Women of Great Britain, I feel it is my duty to put this January issue to the committee of this branch, and I may also send copies to other branches in Edinburgh and Glasgow . . . We do not wish to suppress the artist whose work may be of the modern outspoken trend, but this text has nothing but smut, pornography, sadism and filth. It isn't even English. It is illiterate, unfunny and obscene.<sup>95</sup>

I quote Mrs. Thom's letter, not to ridicule it, but, because it is the sort of response that ruptured absolute presuppositions occasion. Playwrights like Edward Bond seem to be rapidly approaching the kind of theatre which Antonin Artaud says is necessary to restore man to his full powers. Artaud says that,

The theatre like the plague is a crisis which is resolved by death or cure. And the plague is a superior disease because it is a total crisis after which nothing remains except death or an extreme purification. Similarly the theatre is a disease because it is the supreme equilibrium which cannot be achieved without destruction. It invites the mind to share a delirium which exalts its energies; and we can see, to conclude, that from the human point of view, the action of the theatre, like that of the plague, is beneficial, for, impelling men to see themselves as they are, it causes the mask to fall, reveals the lie, shakes off the asphyxiating inertia of matter which invades even the clearest testimony of the senses; and in revealing to collectivities of men their dark power, their hidden force, it invites them to take, in the face of destiny, a superior and heroic attitude they would never have assumed without it [even if, as Bond says, we must learn "to clutch at straws"]<sup>96</sup>



- (8) THE PRINCIPLE OF RADICAL JUXTAPOSITION IS A MUCH-USED TECHNIQUE IN ART OLD AND NEW. TERROR AND LAUGHTER ARE TYPICAL SPECTATOR RESPONSES AT HAPPENINGS WHICH SUSAN SONTAG LABELS "THE ART OF RADICAL JUXTAPOSITION."

There is a Surrealist tradition in the theatre, in painting, in poetry, in the cinema, in music, and in the novel; even in architecture there is, if not a tradition, at least one candidate, the Spanish architect Gaudí. The Surrealist tradition in all these arts is united by the idea of destroying conventional meanings, and creating new meanings or counter-meanings through radical juxtaposition (the "collage principle"). Beauty, in the words of Lautréamont, is "the fortuitous encounter of a sewing machine and an umbrella on a dissecting table." Art so understood is obviously animated by aggression, aggression toward the presumed conventionality of its audience and, above all, aggression toward the medium itself. The Surrealist sensibility aims to shock, through its techniques of radical juxtaposition . . .

The art of radical juxtaposition can serve different uses, however. A great deal of the content of Surrealism has served the purposes of wit -- either the delicious joke in itself or what is inane, childish, extravagant, obsessional; or social satire . . .

But the Surrealist principle can be made to serve other purposes than wit, whether the disinterested wit of sophistication or the polemical wit of satire. It can be conceived more seriously, therapeutically -- for the purpose of reeducating the senses (in art) or the character (in psychoanalysis). And finally, it can be made to serve the purposes of terror. If the meaning of modern art is its discovery beneath the logic of everyday life of the alogic of dreams, then we may expect the art which has the freedom of dreaming also to have its emotional range. There are witty dreams, solemn dreams, and there are nightmares.<sup>97</sup>

Michael Kirby's definition of Happenings is that they are "a form of theatre in which diverse elements, including nonmatrixed performing, are organized in a compartmented



structure."<sup>98</sup> The above-quoted definition by Susan Sontag seems to be much more useful in analysing the techniques of the Happening. Kirby's tracing of the historically formative influences is important for consideration of Happenings as a developing art form but beyond this does not offer much to the reader with a practical interest in the theatre. Miss Sontag's less rigid definition is a more useful tool for describing what Kirby himself calls the "theatre of effect." Let us pursue Miss Sontag's principle of radical juxtaposition by noting its use in some happenings representative of the genre: Spring Happening<sup>99</sup> by Allan Kaprow, Injun<sup>100</sup> by Claes Oldenburg, and Combination Wedding and Funeral<sup>101</sup> by Robert Ashley.

Once Kaprow had the audience enclosed in the narrow, gloomy tunnel with its black curtains and viewing slits, the blackness of the tunnel was immediately impressed upon the spectators by the light's flickering on and off. The uneasy jokes and giggles of the audience were set against the silence in the performance area surrounding them. The packing of the audience was opposed to the seeming vastness outside the tunnel. The silence and decorum of the waiting audience (once the people had settled down to anticipation) was shattered by







the jolting crash and rumble of barrels being thrown to the floor by a man standing on top of the tunnel. We thus see how Kaprow planned the juxtaposition of the audience and the performance. His use of silence and noise, light and darkness enforces this primary juxtaposition. Other elements juxtaposed in the course of the happening were stillness and vibration -- as in the "violent shaking and jumping of the chicken wire, cardboard and newspaper mounted in front of the red wall" which produces only "soft rustling and rattling noises", and then the "loud sharp screech of a power saw";<sup>102</sup> force and silence -- the men violently striking staffs produce only silence; violence and slow motion -- the progression of the jousting match; immobility and movement -- the naked girl and the moving light; animality and vegetation -- the nakedness of the girl and the broccoli seeming to grow out of her mouth; stillness and power -- the girl lies almost motionless under the blanket while the drum beats loudly, and then the roaring noise of the power mower (accompanied by the "steady, supercharged, raucous shriek"<sup>103</sup> of a powerful automobile horn), being steadily pushed by the "expressionless" performer directly at the trapped and terrified spectators.

Claes Oldenburg says that he presents "in a 'happening' anywhere from thirty to seventy-five events, or



happenings (and many more objects), over a period of time from one half to one and a half hours, in simple spatial relationships -- juxtaposed, superimposed."<sup>104</sup> (His method includes people, both audience and performers, among the objects.) Because Injun so well bears out his statement, and hence Miss Sontag's principle, it should only be necessary to quote a few samples of the technique from Michael Kirby's description of the happening. First of all, every object and event is juxtaposed with the place in which Injun occurs. Kirby describes the first room the spectators entered thus:

No windows were visible. The walls were solidly covered with sheets of newspaper, and the floor was hidden by a tangle of newspapers and refuse. Pieces of broken furniture protruded from the rubble. Partially covered by a piece of patterned cloth, a small man with a mustache lay in the centre of the room, his head propped against a bale of hay. He was wearing pajamas, and he played a violin that had only two strings. Occasionally he appeared to sleep.<sup>105</sup>

and another room:

The walls of the room were covered with old, flower-patterned wallpaper. The board floor was bare except for two sets of white long underwear stuffed with newspaper, and two large white balls covered with tape. A dark-haired girl with white stark makeup lay on the dummies.<sup>106</sup>

and the bathroom:

Looking into it, the spectators could see the bathtub filled with soft mud. A man wearing long underwear threw handfuls of mud against the wall and ceiling and decorated the small room with long streamers of toilet paper.<sup>107</sup>



In Robert Ashley's happening the central juxtaposition is to be found in the title itself: Combination Wedding and Funeral. There are distinct contrasts throughout, the first being the appearance of the characters; all are dressed conventionally but the Bride appears to be some sort of animal, her "face and hands are made up with thickly matted hair".<sup>108</sup> One action is set against another: when the Bride is unveiled, and the nuptial kiss is given, the nude girl steps from the box. The solemnity of the liturgy is shattered by the minister's referring to the bride as "Monkey", by the bride's being shackled to the box, and by the foundation for the wedding cake which is a plaster cast of the nude girl. After the couple's second embrace, the box, which before was the hiding place of the nude girl, is placed on the bier to be used as the Bride's coffin. The men and bridesmaids once again file past (they had done so earlier to congratulate the couple,) but this time, to "view the body and place their flowers in the coffin."<sup>109</sup> When the coffin is borne out through the audience, Ashley's happening is ended.

I think we can now see how the art of radical juxtaposition can be used to rupture the banalities of





existence; how the alogic of dreams is rediscovered to the spectator; and perhaps even why Miss Sontag says that happenings are the fullest realization to date of Antonin Artaud's principles for the theatre as set out in The Theatre and its Double. The use of language, music, spectacle, lighting, sounds, stage and audience by the creators of happenings is very similar to Artaud's conception of their use to create a theatre of cruelty (Kirby's theatre of effect?). Happenings make us feel something of the "terrible and necessary cruelty which things can exercise against us; [we know that] we are not free. And the sky can fall on our heads. And the theatre has been created to teach us that first of all."<sup>110</sup>





- (9) IONESCO IS AN ARTIST WHO CREATES POETRY FROM BANALITY BY FINDING THE SURREAL IN THE EVERYDAY.

. . . a public that shudders at train wrecks, that is familiar with earthquakes, plagues, revolutions, wars; that is sensitive to the disordered anguish of love, can be affected by all these grand notions and asks only to become aware of them, but on condition that it is addressed in its own language, and that its knowledge of these things does not come to it through adulterated trappings and speech that belong to extinct eras which will never live again.

Today as yesterday, the public is greedy for mystery: it asks only to become aware of the laws according to which destiny manifests itself, and to divine perhaps the secret of its apparitions.<sup>111</sup>

Such is the public of Ionesco; it is a public that quite calmly goes to and from offices and jobs while outside their security there are wars, riots, nuclear testing, hunger, death, and population explosion. It is a public that has lost its feeling for the mysteries, the strangeness, of life; a public smothered in its own banalities. Ionesco's stereotyped characters mirror this public; his plays' settings duplicate the banal surroundings of this public; but, his manipulation of the commonplace of language releases the potential energy we store when we use ready-made responses to deal with those extreme situations in our lives, like Eliot's stereotypes in Sweeney Agonistes as they undergo the crises of birth,



death, marriage, copulation. Ionesco tells us, in "The Tragedy of Language", that his intention in The Bald Soprano was "to communicate to my contemporaries the essential truths of which the manual of English-French conversation had made me aware."<sup>112</sup> Although Ionesco writes with his tongue in his cheek when he describes these truths -- "that there are seven days in the week . . . that the floor is below us, the ceiling above us"<sup>113</sup> -- he shows us that our forgetting of such basic things is representative of our loss of the sense of mystery that is to be found only in the commonplace. In an essay entitled "The Point of Departure" Ionesco makes his desire to restore the metaphysical dimension to the lives of the Smiths and the Martins of the world unequivocally clear:

. . . the unusual, in my opinion, can arise only from the most colorless and tediously commonplace, from the prose of everyday life, by following it beyond its limits. To feel the absurdity of the commonplace, and of language -- its falseness -- is already to have gone beyond it. To go beyond it we must first of all bury ourselves in it. What is comical is the unusual in its pure state; nothing seems more surprising to me than that which is banal; the surreal is there, within the grasp of our hands, in our everyday conversation.<sup>114</sup>

Although Ionesco himself has commented that The Bald Soprano is "above all about a kind of universal petite bourgeoisie," that it is "a satire of petit bourgeois



mentality that belongs to any particular society"<sup>115</sup>, we must beware of simply interpreting his early plays as being only concerned to show his hatred of the middle class, "the bourgeoisie"; or, his denigration of the expense of conformism to the emptiness of modern life; or, even, his advocacy of awareness and feeling, with the exclusion of the mechanical, in order to maintain and establish authenticity. These elements all figure in Ionesco's early plays, but the plays' unique achievement is the revitalization, the putting into poetry,<sup>116</sup> of the banal situation, the banalities of language, and the stereotyped characters performing their habitual actions. Ionesco forces his audience to partake of the energy released through such revitalization.

In all four of the early plays -- The Bald Soprano, The Lesson, Jack or the Submission, The Chairs -- Ionesco sets up a definite pattern. The setting of each is a middle class home, usually the living room. The atmosphere is always a kind of grey at the beginning. Ionesco usually gives us only a bare minimum of characters (although all seem to be superfluous) of either of two types": the very ordinary and interchangeable "people" such as Mr. and Mrs. Smith, Mr. and Mrs. Martin, the Old Man and the Old Woman, the professor and the pupil; or, the slightly





grotesque or surrealist characters, *The Fire Chief*, *Roberta I and II*, *The Mute Orator*. Often the characters are differentiated only by their function in the household as are the maids in *The Bald Soprano* and *The Lesson*.

The characters all try to communicate but their listeners neither hear nor heed; it is as if each character was in a separate theatre. Each play begins with the bandying back and forth of clichés. These clichés gradually find new life, through the processes of repetition, word play, rhyme, exaggeration, deterioration, distortion, inversion and reversal, until speech becomes a kind of incantation. Throughout there is an aura of loquacious silence. Logic and all other forms of rational discourse are abandoned; the irrational ruptures the banal; the fantastic triumphs over the real. The banal action can either come to a violent conclusion as in *The Chairs* and *Jack*; or, it can begin again as in *The Lesson* and *The Bald Soprano*.

Let us, then, examine one of these plays a little closer. *The Bald Soprano* is the first and perhaps the most representative of the four. The action (or, anti-action, since Ionesco describes the play as an "Anti-play") is set in a "middle-class English interior" containing "English armchairs" and "an English fire." The time of



the action is indicated by "17 English strokes" on "the English clock"; even the silence before the clock strikes is "English". Mr. Smith, "an Englishman", sits "smoking an English pipe and reading an English newspaper" while Mrs. Smith, "an Englishwoman", sits "darning some English socks."<sup>117</sup> (Ionesco's insistent overuse of the word "English" immediately demonstrates much of the Ionesco technique: it illustrates how the needless repetition of a word takes away any meaning that the word might have, but, at the same time, it also illustrates how words in combination -- "English fire", "English silence", "English strokes" -- can reflect on the word's use elsewhere and thus restore some of the original power of the word; its overuse has the levelling effect of making the characters and the objects seem to be of equal importance.) The language, plot, and spectacle of The Bald Soprano are as banal as the characters and the setting; but, the exploration of the banality of each, in context with the absurd and the fantastic, serves to revivify the whole.

The Smiths' onesided exchange of banalities is interrupted by the illogicality of Mr. Smith's musing: "Here's a thing I don't understand. In the newspaper



they always give the age of the deceased but never the age of the newly born."<sup>118</sup> Mrs. Smith's completely commonplace response, "I never thought of that" is significant not only because it shows that they converse without listening to each other, but because it is characteristic of the way that all of the characters, throughout the play, react to the unusual. The oft-quoted Bobby Watson passage is merely an extension of this way of reacting to the illogical. Ionesco also works this inversion the other way; the characters are astonished by the commonplace -- witness Mrs. Martin's relation of having seen a man in the street tie his shoe. Such astonishment at the commonplace is the basis of the repetition of "That is curious! How very bizarre! And what a coincidence!"<sup>119</sup> so many times in the recognition scene between Mr. and Mrs. Martin whom we might suppose to be man and wife if it were not for the maid's interjection that his child has a white right eye and red left eye while hers has a red right eye and a white left eye. This situation, long and logical as it is, demonstrates, as well as the astonishment at the commonplace, the fallacies of logic, and one of the play's many exercises in the demolition of meaningful structures. The everyday action of answering the door leads Mrs. Smith to the





seemingly logical conclusion that when the doorbell rings there is never anyone there. Her observation gives rise to a new exchange of clichés (this time in chorus) until the Fire Chief, who, incidentally, wants to find a fire to put out, enters and begins to tell jokes that have no punch lines or point. After the Fire Chief leaves (in order to be on time for a scheduled "straw fire and a little heart-burn"),<sup>120</sup> the "conversation" between the Smiths and the Martins disintegrates into a series of misfired platitudes<sup>121</sup> and proverbs that are not genuine but have the tone and structure of those that we are accustomed to:

Mrs. Martin: I can buy a pocketknife for my brother, but you can't buy Ireland for your grandfather.

Mr. Smith: One walks on his feet, but one heats with electricity or coal.

Mr. Martin: He who sells an ox today, will have an egg tomorrow.

. . . . .  
Mrs. Smith: I'm waiting for the aqueduct to come and see me at my windmill.

Mr. Martin: One can prove that social progress is definitely better with sugar.

Mr. Smith: To hell with polishing.<sup>122</sup>

The platitudes themselves eventually degenerate into word associations that are based simply on sounds, not meaning:

Mrs. Martin: Don't ruche my brooch!

Mr. Martin: Don't smooch the brooch!

Mr. Smith: Groom the goose, don't goose the groom.

Mrs. Martin: The goose grooms.





Mrs. Smith: Groom your tooth.  
 Mr. Martin: Groom the bridegroom, groom the bridegroom.  
 Mr. Smith: Seducer seduced!  
 Mrs. Martin: Scaramouche!  
 Mrs. Smith: Sainte-Nitouche!  
 Mr. Martin: Go take a douche.  
 Mr. Smith: I've been goosed.  
 Mrs. Martin: Sainte-Nitouche stoops to my cartouche.  
 Mrs. Smith: Who'd stoop to blame? . . . and I never choose  
 to stoop."<sup>123</sup>

And, finally, even these fade into completely unconnected sounds and words. It is thus that Ionesco achieves what Antonin Artaud described as the ideal function of spoken language in the theatre:

To make metaphysics out of a spoken language is to make the language express what it does not ordinarily express: to make use of it in a new, exceptional, and unaccustomed fashion, to reveal its possibilities for producing physical shock; to divide and distribute it actively in space; to deal with intonations in an absolutely concrete manner, restoring their power to shatter as well as to manifest something; to turn against language and its basely utilitarian, one could say alimentary sources, against its trapped-beast origins; and finally, to consider language as the form of incantation.<sup>124</sup>



- (10) ALBEE'S ATTEMPTS TO DESTROY THE BARRIERS THAT STIFLE COMMUNICATION ARE A PRIMARY PART OF THE DISPLAY OF HIS DISSATISFACTION WITH EXISTENCE.

The modern dramatist is essentially a metaphysical rebel, not a practical revolutionary; whatever his personal political convictions, his art is the expression of a spiritual condition. For he is a militant of the ideal, an anarchic individualist, concerned with the impossible rather than the possible; and his discontent extends to the very roots of existence. The work of art itself becomes a subversive gesture -- a more imaginative reconstruction of a chaotic, disordered world.<sup>125</sup>

I suggest that Edward Albee's The Zoo Story, an extremely ambitious little play, is representative of the genre so understandingly described by Mr. Brustein. Albee's play, although only about forty minutes long, attempts to incorporate and explore all three categories of the theatre of revolt: the messianic, the social, and the existential as Brustein catalogues them.<sup>126</sup>

On the social level one of Albee's protests is against the middle class armour afforded by being "neither fat nor gaunt, neither handsome nor homely"<sup>127</sup>; wearing tweeds, smoking a pipe and carrying horn-rimmed glasses; being in publishing, making eighteen thousand a year, and reading Time magazine; having "one wife, two daughters, two cats and two parakeets" (all, or any, of which seem to be interchangeable as is revealed in Peter's relaxation



during the tickling bout:" . . . after all, the parakeets will be getting dinner ready soon. Hee, hee. And the cats are setting the table"<sup>128</sup>). It is this kind of armoured complacency, Albee implies, that makes a zoo of this our world, a zoo "with everyone separated by bars from everyone else, the animals for the most part from each other, and always the people from the animals."<sup>129</sup> Jerry, as opposed to Peter, refuses to insulate his life with possession of "things" (family, or material) that normally form the spine of our security. Jerry can very simply list the sum total of his "worldly possessions":

. . . toilet articles, a few clothes, a hot plate that I'm not supposed to have, a can opener, one that works with a key, you know; a knife, two forks, and two spoons, one small, one large; three plates, a cup, a saucer, a drinking glass, two picture frames, both empty, eight or nine books, a pack of pornographic playing cards, regular deck, an old Western Union typewriter that prints nothing but capital letters . . .<sup>130</sup>

In fact, he has probably not enough to live comfortably. While Peter surrounds himself with possessions and pre-formed ideas -- he is only too willing to discuss his prepared, and probably borrowed, ideas on Baudelaire and Marquand; he is disappointed that he cannot put Jerry into his "Village" pigeonhole -- Jerry, denying security, is anxious to "make contact", to understand, to feel a communion with another animal, two or four-legged. Jerry would like





"to talk to somebody, really talk; like to get to know somebody, know all about him."<sup>131</sup> He has a fellow-feeling, unknown to Peter living in his apartment in the "East Seventies", for the other outcasts existing in "a four-story brownstone roominghouse"; for the "colored queen", the "Puerto Rican family", the lady who cries all the time, even for his landlady who is "a fat, ugly, mean, stupid, unwashed, misanthropic, cheap, drunken bag of garbage", and for her "black monster of a dog."<sup>132</sup>

That Albee is writing drama of social revolt can hardly be denied, especially when Albee himself outlines his purpose as he did in the preface to The American Dream which he describes as

an examination of the American Scene, an attack on the substitution of artificial for real values in our society, a condemnation of complacency, cruelty, emasculation and vacuity; it is a stand against the fiction that everything in this slipping land of ours is peachy keen.<sup>133</sup>

Such a statement is almost equally applicable to The Zoo Story, except that The Zoo Story goes beyond and beneath the concern with "this slipping land", that is to say, the level of social revolt. The aim of the play seems to be a combination of existential and messianic revolt.

Jerry is the antihero of existential revolt -- he is an outcast, a "permanent transcient"<sup>134</sup>; several



times in the course of the play he is described as mad. As Brustein comments, one of the central themes in the drama of existential revolt is loneliness -- Jerry is forever seeking that elusive "contact". Albee represents Jerry as "raging against existence, ashamed of being human, revolted by the body itself."<sup>135</sup> The "muck, mud, ashes, and fecal matter," that Brustein describes as characteristic images in the drama of existential revolt, are, in The Zoo Story, the cancer of mouth and lung, the sweat and smell of the human body, and the stench of the zoo: Jerry comments that Peter's most trying experience is "changing your cats' toilet box"<sup>136</sup>; he tells Peter that his landlady,

. . . presses her disgusting body up against me to keep me in a corner so she can talk to me. The smell of her body and her breath . . . you can't imagine it . . . and somewhere in the back of that pea-shaped brain of hers, an organ developed just enough to let her eat, drink, and emit, she has some foul parody of sexual desire. And I, Peter, am the object of her sweaty lust. . . .<sup>137</sup>

The coloured queen has rotten teeth. Jerry's mother was "a stiff, a northern stiff"<sup>138</sup> shipped North from Alabama for burial. Jerry lives in a Hell of which his landlady and her dog are the gatekeepers; he is "underground man."<sup>139</sup> Yet, he does not have the impotence common to the underground man; he utters the "cry of anguish over the insufferable



state of being human"<sup>140</sup>, but he does not merely accept and wait. Jerry eludes the deterioration of his confinement in the flesh. He does not have the anti-hero's "distaste for humanistic affirmations."<sup>141</sup> His choice to abdicate by suicide, and thus destroy Peter's faith in the God of "things", brings the play to the messianic level of revolt.

Brustein says of the messianic hero that he is a superman, combining the qualities of malefactor and benefactor -- of one who kills God and builds a church. As a malefactor he is in the tradition of earlier Romantic heroes . . . an outlaw, warring on society and seeking complete gratification beyond conventional laws. . . . In short, the messianic hero feels accursed, and draws his defiance and strength from the deepest springs of evil . . . Like most saviors, he suffers the fate of the scapegoat at the hands of the multitude . . . [Yet] his superiority lies not so much in noble birth, physical prowess, or miraculous deeds as in certain lofty moral and spiritual qualities which raise him above the common run of men.<sup>142</sup>

Jerry's rebellion against the old God is evident in his conception of God's having "turned his back on the whole thing some time ago"; to Jerry, God is now "A COLORED QUEEN WHO WEARS A KIMONO AND PLUCKS HIS EYEBROWS . . . IS A WOMAN WHO CRIES WITH DETERMINATION BEHIND HER CLOSED DOOR"<sup>143</sup>, an outcast like Jerry himself. The god of the people is property -- witness Peter's fight for possession





of a public park bench -- it is this god that Jerry wants to kill. Although no superman, Jerry does plan the entire action that takes place "at the zoo". He is the outlaw, his gratification is by suicide; but, he is also the savior: he speaks in Biblical locutions<sup>144</sup> ("And it came to pass that the beast was deathly ill"; "So be it"; "I came unto you . . . and you have comforted me")<sup>145</sup>; Jerry teaches, even though his teaching is by a combination of kindness and cruelty; he has the visionary's knowledge -- he knows that, because of man's inability to communicate, "sometimes a person has to go a very long distance out of his way to come back a short distance correctly"<sup>146</sup>; he is willing to sacrifice himself to show Peter that, in order to be more than a vegetable, he must give up his god of property and become concerned about his fellow man, that he must try to communicate and even be willing to sacrifice his life.

Although he shows us Jerry's success in building "his church", Albee, true to the modern tradition of revolt, leaves us with uneasy feelings. Is the only way to communicate through the death of one of the communicants? Will the sacrifice that Jerry has made have its expected effect on Peter? Will his "church" have any lasting influence on Peter? Or, has it simply destroyed the





little that Peter did have? Brustein tells us that the dramatist of revolt vacillates between "negation and affirmation"; that he is "grateful for a form in which tensions do not have to be resolved."<sup>147</sup> Such a dramatist is Albee.



## CHAPTER II

### MACBETH AS AN ABSURDIST PLAY

Time has the effect of seeming to quiet the work of art, domesticating it and making it into a classic, which is another way of saying that it is an object of merely habitual regard.<sup>1</sup>

If Mr. Trilling is correct, and there seems to be little reason to doubt it, Macbeth is not a classic, and it is our responsibility to see that it does not become one. Macbeth can today speak louder than it has for a good long time; the principal explorations of the modern theatre can show us why this is true. Jan Kott points the way when he says,

Since the end of the eighteenth century no dramatist has had a greater impact on European drama than Shakespeare. But the theatres in which Shakespeare's plays have been produced were in turn influenced by contemporary plays. Shakespeare has been a living influence in so far as contemporary plays, through which his dramas were interpreted, were a living force themselves. When Shakespeare is dull and dead on the stage, it means that not only the theatre but the plays written in that particular period are dead. This is one of the reasons why Shakespeare's universality has never dated.<sup>2</sup>

Most critics see that the modern theatre is more alive than ever; this being so, tracing of the reciprocal influence described by Kott should be extremely fruitful.



- (1) SHAKESPEARE'S MACBETH IS NOT PURE TRAGEDY. THERE ARE IN MACBETH AT LEAST THREE COMIC SCENES AS WELL AS NUMEROUS TECHNIQUES THAT CUSTOMARILY ARE THE PROVINCE OF COMEDY.

Shakespeare holds such a strong interest for our day because his plays are, as Durrenmatt suggests good plays must be, much more than whisperings of "pleasant stories", or praises of "beautiful landscapes", or even that "pure poetry" that all "non-poets" expect.<sup>3</sup> In most of Shakespeare's plays, but especially in Macbeth, we sense the "fear, worry and above all anger" that have caused the playwright to "open his mouth wide."<sup>4</sup>

Shakespeare's art, like Durrenmatt's, might well be viewed as a series of experiments in exploration of both his medium and the human situation in a time of great upheaval. If we can accept Shakespeare's art as such a series of experiments, the explorations cannot be rigidly classified as tragedy, or comedy, or history. Durrenmatt, we recall, says that these categories are simply "dramatic attitudes, figments of the aesthetic imagination."<sup>5</sup>

Indeed, when we look closely at Macbeth, which Coleridge felt to be entirely serious throughout<sup>6</sup>, we see that there is at least one frighteningly comic scene in each of the three central acts: the Porter's scene (II,iii)<sup>7</sup>, the Banquet scene (III,iv), and the Macduff family slaughter





scene (IV,ii). Each of these scenes functions so that the comic and tragic elements have a mutually intensifying effect.

The entrance of the porter immediately after the death of King Duncan has a burlesquing effect on the preceding action. His balanced paradoxes and involved puns, his drunkenness, his uncouth references to lechery, and his infernal imagination are all comical and serve for more than a comic-relief effect. Besides outlining for the audience the important theme of equivocation, the porter's appearance serves to show that the death of Duncan does not stop the banal functions of the world. As Koestler says, "exaltation is debunked by the sudden impact of the trivial."<sup>8</sup> Shakespeare here grafts upon the "dramatic text a clownesque interpretation, underlining by farce the tragic sense . . . [and thus avoids] the ridiculousness of easy tears, of sentimentality [over the death of Duncan]".<sup>9</sup>

The Banquet scene, although one of the most serious in its implications for the overall action of the play, is also one of the most humorous. Macbeth jokes "'Tis better thee without, than he within" (III,iv,14) and makes a pun on the words "cut" and "throat" (III,iv,16),



but these effects are minor when compared with the grotesque comicality of the pantomime of the ghost who sits in Macbeth's place and shakes his "gory locks" (III,iv,50). Added to this are Lady Macbeth's chastisement of her husband (III,iv,59-67), and his fearful playing of the bragadoccio (III,iv,98-105). The supreme irony of the ghost's appearance, though, is in the fact that it is so obedient to the presumptuous and hypocritical Macbeth's commands: twice Macbeth invites his presence at the table and twice the ghost takes Macbeth's place. Shakespeare seems to have known that "There is something that moves one to laughter, if only our social pieties and highly conventional sense of the serious would allow it, in the most terrible . . . catastrophies and atrocities."<sup>10</sup>

This comical-horror effect is heightened in the pathetic, but humorous, exchange between Lady Macduff and her precocious son. The banality of the situation of wife at home and husband away is revitalized by the comical-horror effect. There is here a restatement of the Porter's remarks on the nature of the equivocator (IV,ii,44-50), and again the pun plays a significant part in the dialogue. Here, then, we see a kind of inversion



of the technique of the Porter's scene where the comic was given birth from the tragic: here the tragic arises out of the pathetically comic. Where before we saw that "Light makes shadow deeper" now we see that "shade accentuates the light."<sup>11</sup>



- (2) IN THE ABSURD WORLD OF MACBETH ACTIONS ARE SIGNIFICANT ONLY INsofar AS BY ACTING THE VICTIM-ACTOR PROLONGS HIS SUFFERING.

The world in which the comic and the tragic are gratuitously born from the same womb is the absurd world. It is a world where witches, the representatives of the hostile and absurd, arrest the unknowing progress of every man. In this world man has choices but the alternatives are bad: man can act in order to arrive at his end, or man can refuse to act and still arrive at the same end. The end is always death; man is always a victim and his actions are inconsequential to the path described by the order of evil in the absurd universe. As G. Wilson Knight observes,

[Macbeth] asks if Banquo's issue shall reign in Scotland: most horrible thought to him, since, if that be so, it proves that the future takes its natural course irrespective of human acts -- that prophecy need not have been interpreted into crime: that he would in truth have been King of Scotland without his own 'stir'. . . .<sup>12</sup>

Jan Kott reinforces Knight's point when he says,

In Shakespeare all human values are brittle and the world is stronger than men. The implacable steam-roller of history crushes everybody and everything. Man is determined by his situation, by the step of the Grand Staircase on which he happens to find himself. It is that particular step that determines his freedom of choice. . . . Freedom is only the conscious recognition of necessity.<sup>13</sup>





Action may be free but consequences are fixed and immutable. Further, as the ambiguity in Macbeth suggests, it makes no difference in the absurd world whether the end is brought about by "juggling fiends [who] palter with us in a double sense" (V,viii,19-20) or by "the Powers above [who] put on their instruments" (IV,iii,238-39) -- "a rose by any other name . . . ."

The world in which Macbeth has lived, until his confrontation with the Weird Sisters, is not so unsimilar to Pinter's created world which Ruby Cohn describes as "one where people live their lives like driving a car in neutral, until they are forced to respond by something external, the intruder who enters and reverses a stable situation or renders it ludicrous."<sup>14</sup> Like Pinter's characters, Macbeth lives in an ideological void where reason and logic are futile weapons against this intruder from the "vast irrational."<sup>15</sup> The vast irrational is represented in Macbeth by the witches. Four centuries of Shakespearean criticism have failed to determine their exact nature, but let us take the lead provided in Kafka's Trial where the force that controls man's life, and death, is completely beyond man's ken. The representatives of "the court" that K. meets are only on a low level of the hierarchy (as are the witches and Hecate<sup>16</sup>). K. can only



speculate about the nature of the court and the provocation, if any, that has caused it to select him rather than someone else for punishment. The absurdity of his speculation is well demonstrated in the course of the novel. More simply, the absurdity of such speculation can be seen in The Dumb Waiter: does Gus have to die because he has said "light the gas"<sup>17</sup> instead of "light the kettle"<sup>18</sup> as does the being at the top of the dumbwaiter?<sup>19</sup> I would suggest, therefore, that we take the hint provided by the modern perspective and avoid further nonsense by realizing that the witches are simply another unknowable entity in an absurd world. All we can be sure of is that the witches are effective dramatic symbols for evil which works through deception and divisiveness to attain its foreknown ends.



- (3) ONE OF THE PRINCIPAL THEMES OF MACBETH IS EQUIVOCATION. EQUIVOCATION MAKES FEARFUL AND LONELY CREATURES OF ALL IMPORTANT CHARACTERS.

In the absurd world man is alone, there is no place for the emotions that tie men together: the Macbeths cannot be "dearest partner[s] of greatness [or defeat]" (I,v,11); Duncan's sons must flee to separate countries; Banquo's and Macbeth's friendship is defeated by conflict of interest; Macduff must choose between loyalties and leave his family to be murdered. When fear, dread, and treachery flourish, equivocation abounds and communication is destroyed. Ambiguity and paradox become the manner of speaking in the everthreatening world, "false face must hide what the false heart doth know" (I,vii,83).

All of the principal characters in Macbeth are equivocators. The Weird Sisters "technically"<sup>20</sup> equivocate with both Macbeth and Banquo -- they prophesy but refuse to tell how the prophecies will come about; they present Macbeth with apparitions which, while verbally reassuring him, symbolize his downfall. Macbeth equivocates at least twice with his wife -- his letter does not tell her that the witches promised kingship to Banquo's issue; he only hints that he is going to have Banquo killed. Ross equivocates with Macbeth by paying him with the title





"Thane of Cawdor" as "an earnest of greater honour" (I,iii,104). Duncan is a master of double talk; after he makes the promise he does not intend to fulfill -- "I have begun to plant thee, and will labour/To make thee full of growing" (I,iv,28-29) -- he abruptly frustrates Macbeth's hopes by naming Malcolm heir to the throne; he glibly matches Lady Macbeth's double meanings (I,vi,10-24). Lady Macbeth equivocates directly with the audience when in the sleepwalking scene she writes but we do not know what. Macbeth sums up the effect of equivocation in the world when he says,

. . . function is smothered in surmise  
And nothing is, but what is not. (I,iii,141-142)

Objects, too, are equivocal, whether banal or supernatural. Clothes are equivocal, they hide the thief as well as the king. Is the dagger real or a creation of the "heat-oppressed brain" (II,i,39)? is it intended to "provoke" or "unprovoke" (II,iii,29) Macbeth to the crime? Nature is upset by the crime; or, is it that the unnatural elements are symbolically celebrating the triumph of evil? Life is equivocal -- Who is the third murderer? who sent him? and why? Death, too, is equivocal in the Macbeth universe:



the time has been,  
That, when the brains were out, the man would die,  
And there an end; but now they rise again,  
With twenty mortal murders on their crowns,  
And push us from our stools. This is more strange  
Than such a murder is. (III,iv,77-82)



- (4) PARADOXICALLY, DREAD IN MACBETH IS THE ORIGINAL FREEDOM CLINGING TO EACH AUTHENTIC ACT AND IT IS IMPASSE, WHICH MACBETH TRIES TO AVOID BY OUTFRUNNING REASON.

The epitome of the equivocal, however, is in none of the above-listed things. Rather, it is in the perpetual impasse from which man must act. In the Macbeth world "Heaven [will not] peep through the blanket of the dark, / To cry, 'Hold, hold!'" (I,v,53-54); neither will it take Macduff's family's "part" (IV,iii,223-224). Man is "condemned to be free"<sup>21</sup> and is responsible for the act, or failure to act, that condemns him. Although no man can avoid his fated death, one can, by acts and suffering, become conscious of the absurdity of existence.

None of the characters, except Macbeth, achieves this authentic apex of being. Banquo refuses to act on the prophecies of the Weird Sisters; he chooses to wait for external release from the impasse which dread puts him in:

If there come truth from them  
(As upon thee, Macbeth, their speeches shine),  
Why, by the verities on thee made good,  
May they not be my oracles as well,  
And set me up in hope? But, hush; no more.  
(III,i,6-10)

Lady Macbeth is willing, but unable, to become the earthly witch, her memory of her father keeps her from acting in the boundary situation, and her conscience condemns her



for the part she has played. She is unable to make the leap that keeps one free, for a while, from final condemnation. Duncan, Malcolm, and Macduff choose to think that the universe is divinely ordered. Shakespeare, the subversive playwright, questions their belief by showing us that during Duncan's reign equivocation prospered; that he could only hold his place through Macbeth and Banquo's murders which quell the revolution; that Duncan's justice, far from being divine, was more or less arbitrarily swayed to the execution of Cawdor.<sup>22</sup> In order for Malcolm to be king, the revolutionary must again be executed; rumour still flourishes-" 'tis thought, by self and violent hands/Took off her life" (V,ix,36-37); and once again we see the king "paying" his thanes and kinsmen. One can perhaps see the "Grand Mechanism"<sup>23</sup> (that Jan Kott described in the Histories) working also in Macbeth. This Grand Mechanism is the "situation" or impasse that all men are in.

Dread, that giddiness "on the pinnacle of freedom"<sup>24</sup>, is evidently Macbeth's first significant feeling in the drama. When the witches inform him of seemingly impossible possibilities, he can only stand "rapt" (I,iii,57 and I,iii,143). He later describes the feeling that shook him here and shakes him again when given the title "Thane of Cawdor":





This supernatural soliciting  
 Cannot be ill; cannot be good: --  
 If ill, why hath it given me earnest of success,  
 Commencing in a truth? I am Thane of Cawdor:  
 If good, why do I yield to that suggestion  
 Whose horrid image doth unfix my hair,  
 And make my seated heart knock at my ribs,  
 Against the use of nature? Present fears  
Are less than horrible imaginings.  
 My thought, whose murther yet is but fantastical,  
 Shakes so my single state of man,  
 That function is smothered in surmise,  
 And nothing is, but what is not.

(I,iii,130-142)

Macbeth's ensuing actions indicate that we cannot know  
 the motives he works from, if indeed there are any. As  
 long as he uses his powers of reason, Macbeth cannot act.  
 Macbeth is caught in the "trammel"<sup>25</sup> net of the impasse  
 until he lets passion "Outrun the pauser, reason"  
 (II,iii,111); but, as the image of the trammel net  
 implies, the more he fights the more securely he is  
 trapped. Each impasse is more difficult to break out  
 of than the previous one and each break is punished more  
 severely than the one before. Jan Kott describes the  
 situation thus:

Macbeth has killed the king because he could not accept  
 a Macbeth who would be afraid to kill a king. But Macbeth  
 who has killed cannot accept the Macbeth who has killed.  
 Macbeth has killed in order to get rid of a nightmare.  
 But it is the necessity of murder that makes the nightmare.  
 A nightmare is terrifying just because it has no end.  
 'The night is long that never finds the day.' (IV,3)  
 The night enveloping Macbeth is deeper and deeper.  
 Macbeth has murdered for fear, and goes on murdering for  
 fear.<sup>26</sup>



Macbeth, after the murder of Banquo, describes the impasse and the way out of it:

I am in blood  
 Steep'd in so far, that, should I wade no more,  
 Returning were as tedious as go o'er.  
 Strange things I have in head, that will to hand,  
 Which must be acted, ere they may be scann'd.  
 (III,iv,135-139)

Again, after the second meeting with the witches where dread again almost conquers him, he re-affirms:

The flighty purpose never is o'ertook,  
 Unless the deed go with it. From this moment  
 The very firstlings of my heart shall be  
 The firstlings of my hand.  
 . . . . .  
 This deed I'll do, before this purpose cool:  
 But no more sights!  
 (IV,i,145-55)

Each of the murders brings him that much deeper into the net, that much closer to true knowledge of the absurd, but he is unconvinced until he has discarded the last vestiges of reason.

When Lady Macbeth dies, Macbeth describes life in the absurd world thus:

To-morrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow,  
 Creeps in this petty pace from day to day  
 To the last syllable of recorded time;  
 And all our yesterdays have lighted fools  
 The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!  
 Life's but a walking shadow; a poor player  
 That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,  
 And then is heard no more: it is a tale  
 Told by an idiot full of sound and fury,  
 Signifying nothing.  
 (V,v,19-28)



Yet he himself does not believe it. As long as he has faith in the natural world -- trees cannot move, no man can be not of woman born -- and as long as he only knows the "imposters to true fear" (III,iv,63), Macbeth is little more than a literal-minded man being duped by the agents of the hostile world. It is only after he has seen Birnam Wood approach Dunsinane and has learned that Macduff was "untimely ripp'd" (V,viii,16) from his mother's womb, that Macbeth consciously faces the void. When, instead of despairing, Macbeth vows to "try the last" (V,viii,32), only then does he become tragic; once and for all he must accept the impasse.

We see then that Shakespeare was even more pessimistic than Sartre who believes that consciousness of the absurdity can create some kind of meaning from the meaningless. Shakespeare shows the grotesque effect of Macbeth's "becoming": Macbeth cannot face what his acts make him -- "To know my deed, 'twere best not know myself" (II,ii,72). After all, what value is there in being authentic if one can only be an authentic murderer, a destroyer of others as well as of oneself?





- (5) THE NIGHTMARE ASPECT OF MACBETH IS A DARK COMIC EFFECT OF THE METAPLAY. MACBETH AND HIS LADY WOULD BE PLAYWRIGHTS IF THEY COULD PLAN IN THEIR SCENARIOS FOR THE INTRUSIONS OF THE HOSTILE WORLD.

An examination of Macbeth as metaplay reinforces what has just been said about this work as a pessimistic demonstration of the absurd world. When the universe is absurd, the world is indeed a stage and life is not a dream but a nightmare. Macbeth has its actors who have the playwright's consciousness; actors who aspire to be directors; and actors who are simply actors. In the first category are, of course, the Weird Sisters; in the second, Macbeth and Lady Macbeth, Malcolm, Duncan, and Macduff; in the last, Banquo, all three of the murderers (even though they probably have different directors), Lady Macduff, her son, and all the other minor characters.

When the curtain rises, we are informed by the Weird Sisters (the directors) that the scenario is being set: the time, the place, and the cast are announced. In the next scene we are given more information about the main characters who have played their parts so well in putting down the revolution. These actors we would not expect to act so readily in the witches' scenario; however, when Macbeth and Banquo are promised truly great parts, they are sorely tempted to accept. Macbeth accepts



when he learns that the directions are accurate and that the part can be played:

Two truths are told,  
As happy prologues to the swelling act  
Of the imperial theme.  
(I,iii,127-129)

That this is really a scenario is emphasized by the two references to costume: "why do you dress me/In borrowed robes?" (I,iii,108-109) and, "New honours come upon him,/Like our strange garments, cleave not to their mold,/But with the aid of use" (I,iii,145-147). Macbeth will need some rehearsals before he fits the part.

Duncan's "There's no art/To find the mind's construction in the face" (I,iv,11-12), and Cawdor's having "studied" (I,iv,9) the part of the noble man about to be executed, re-emphasize the feeling that we are watching actors acting.

Lady Macbeth's invocation to the spirits to "unsex" her and make her an earthly witch is easily construed as her plea to become a playwright. By the end of the scene, she gives her first stage direction to the actor Macbeth:

Only look up clear  
To alter favour ever is to fear,  
Leave all the rest to me.  
(I,v,71-73)

Macbeth can vacillate and have doubts about the part assigned by his wife until she gives him the time, the



place and the method for his role as murderer. She assures him that the part can be played: "But screw your courage to the sticking-place,/And we'll not fail" (I,vii,61-62), and informs him how to play the role of the true man after he has played the role of murderer:

Who dares receive it other,  
As we shall make our griefs and clamour roar  
Upon his death.

(I,vii,78-80)

Macbeth plays both roles well even though he does at times have to be prompted and given further directions.

We see that Macbeth has played the part so far prescribed by the witches, but, when he discovers that they have given him a "fruitless crown" and a "barren sceptre" (III,i,60-61) he decides to become the playwright himself. He will have actors perform the death of Banquo and thus rob Banquo of the part he has been given. He will have a celebration banquet where he "will play the humble host" (III,iv,4). What Macbeth does not know, though, is that in this stage-world there are actors who do not accept orders from human playwrights. The third murderer is an actor sent by another playwright (probably the witches) to ensure that Macbeth's script is not completed. The Ghost of Banquo's entrance has not been provided for in Macbeth's other scenario: the Macbeths have not given the ghost any lines so his scene





must be pantomime; they have not matrixed his entrances and exits before, so he must come and go only as Macbeth tells him to. The ghost serves to show Macbeth that he cannot be a playwright, indeed, that he is not even a very proficient actor. Macbeth resolves to become a good actor before he will again attempt the role of the playwright:

My strange and self-abuse  
Is the initiate fear, that wants hard use:  
We are yet but young in deed.

(III,iv,142-143)

He will again subject himself to the direction of the Weird Sisters; he will play the part of the murderer to the end.

What he does not realize though is that on this nightmare stage of equivocation the metaplaywright is working against the actor; the witches will,

. . . raise such artificial sprites,  
As, by the strength of their illusion  
Shall draw him on to his confusion.  
He shall spurn fate, scorn death, and bear  
His hopes 'bove wisdom, grace, and fear;

(III,v,27-31)

Although on first thought we might feel admiration for Macbeth's refusal to commit suicide, to "play the Roman fool" (V,viii,1), and for his resolution to "try the last" (V,viii,32), we must, upon reflection, realize that his actions are really part of the Weird Sisters'





script. The Macbeth scenario cannot end except by Macbeth's being struck down by a man "that was not born of woman" (V,vii,3). Macbeth must finally accept that life is nightmare from which there is "no exit".

Thus, the treatment of Macbeth as metaplay reveals not only the tragic but the comic elements of the play. We see that Macbeth acts as something of a "mechanical"; Arthur Koestler explains that "one of the devices of sustained humour is impersonation."<sup>27</sup> By being the impersonator who "is two different people at one time,"<sup>28</sup> the character Macbeth somewhat eludes the audience's identification with him. This leaves the audience free not only to laugh but to be caught in the "mousetrap"<sup>29</sup> that comedy is.

Koestler explains how the artist/humourist can rupture the conventional:

There are two ways of escaping our more or less automated routines of thinking and behaving. The first, of course is the plunge into dreaming or dream-like states, when the codes of rational thinking are suspended. The other way is also an escape -- from boredom, stagnation, intellectual predicaments, and emotional frustration -- but an escape in the opposite direction; it is signalled by the spontaneous flash of insight which shows a familiar situation in a new light, and elicits a new response to it. The bisociative act [reversal, metaphysical shudder, radical juxtaposition, banal explosion] connects previously unconnected matrices of experience; it makes us 'understand what it is to be awake, to be living on several planes at once . . . .'<sup>30</sup>

Shakespeare in Macbeth uses both "ways" and so do most of the playwrights that Esslin calls "absurdists".



(6) THROUGH REVERSALS SHAKESPEARE SHOWS THE GROWTH  
AND DECAY OF THE PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS IN MACBETH.

All principle characters of Macbeth grow by at least one, and sometimes a series of reversals; the more complex the character, the more reversals there are. The basic reversal has been noted by Jan Kott in his analysis of the history plays:<sup>31</sup> this movement from victim to executioner to victim is central to the figures of Duncan and Macbeth, and perhaps also to those of Malcolm and Macduff. Malcolm and Macduff are at first the righteous cowards who flee from the land of murder, they return as murderers who defeat the cowardly forces of Macbeth, (Macduff commits the most inhuman act of the play: the cutting off of Macbeth's head). Lady Macbeth's growth can be traced from loving and devoted wife to earthly witch (although not completely successful), to somnambulist plagued with conscience. Macbeth begins, by report, as "valour's minion" (the military athlete) but we first see him as a man dressed in General's armour who "start[s] and seem[s] to fear" (I,iii,54); Lady Macbeth tells us that he is "too full o' th' milk of human kindness" (I,v,17), yet he is able to kill his sleeping king; he becomes the fearful hypocrite after the first murder but moves on to be the bloody tyrant; he is seen as a



"dwarfish thief" (V,ii,22), yet he fights bravely against all odds.

There are many reversals in the relations between the characters. The Macbeths begin as "dearest partner[s]" and end completely separate with Macbeth saying, upon Lady Macbeth's death, "She should have died hereafter:/There would have been time for such a word" (V,v,17-18). The Macduffs begin apart with Lady Macduff's calling her husband "traitor", but, when Macduff hears of his family's death, he is the griefstricken husband and father who adds revenge to his other reasons for returning to Scotland. Macbeth and Banquo begin as "two spent swimmers" (I,ii,8) fighting for their King, they become direst enemies each jealous of the other's promised future. Most important of all, however, is the relation of Macbeth and the Weird Sisters: they accost Macbeth in his day of success, he returns to them after he has failed; the witches are first Macbeth's tempters to evil and greatness, they later become the agents of his defeat.

Less obvious, but no less important, are the reversals in dialogue and action scattered throughout the play. The witches' equation of opposites -- "Fair is foul, and foul is fair" (I,i,11) -- sets the atmosphere of moral twilight that covers the entire action.





Characters say the opposite of what is expected, for example,

Macb. Your children shall be kings.

Ban. You shall be King.

Macb. And Thane of Cawdor too;

(I,iii,87-88)

or, "my dull brain was wrought/With things forgotten"

(I,iii,150-151). When Macbeth curses the witches --

"Infected be the air whereon they ride;/And damned all

those that trust them!" (IV,i,38-39) -- we know that he

is cursing himself. There is one final reversal that

can only be remarked after the last action of the play

for Macbeth: the apparitions appear to him in the order,

"armed head", "bloody child", and "a child crowned with

a tree in his hand"; the order of the action is first

the use of the trees of Birnam forest by the "child"

Malcolm, then the fight with Macduff who was a "bloody

child", and finally Macbeth's "armed head" is brought on

stage without its body.



- (7) SHAKESPEARE CATCHES AT THE UNIVERSAL MYSTERIOUSNESS OF LIFE THROUGH THE WITCHES AND THE MACBETHS. THEIR ACTIONS EVOKE A RESPONSE SIMILAR TO THE METAPHYSICAL SHUDDER.

All of the above-noted reversals add to the blurring effects and lack of certainty that pervade the action in an absurd world. So too does Shakespeare's technique of evoking ambivalent states of mind in his audience, experiences not essentially different from what has been called metaphysical shudder.<sup>32</sup> He is aware that his age is undergoing a revision of its absolute presuppositions, of the very basis of its thinking, feeling and acting. Against the naturalists, he would insist on the mystery of existence which their oversimplifications threaten.

In the time when even the King, James I, was explaining and analysing what witches were and how they worked, and thus reducing one of the great incomprehensible phenomena of the age to the textbook level, Shakespeare must have decided that such things were not so simple. Shakespeare does much the same thing with the witches that Donne did with his feelings about love and death -- he recreates their mystery and, by so doing, communicates the "effect of terror" to his audience. The mystery of witches is emphasized by their appearance as other than



human, by their paradoxical chants and prophecies, by man's failure to comprehend their corporeal natures (I,iii,83-85), by their creation out of chaos (IV,i), and by the fact that they communicate with one man while another is completely unaware of their presence at a given spot (IV,i,135-137). This constant reiteration of uncertainty would cause the audience to shudder when they realized that the explanations of King James and Reginald Scott were not as final as they might have hoped.

Shakespeare's explorations are not, however, limited to the mystery of the supernatural. He demonstrates that there is much that is mysterious and uncertain about man too. Macbeth is a brave and loyal soldier, yet, when he first comes on stage his words echo those of the witches ("Fair is foul . . ." and "So foul and fair a day . . .")<sup>34</sup>. By this we know that there is a bond of some sort between Macbeth and the Weird Sisters, but how is it established? and why? is the bond proof that the witches' charm (I,iii,32-37) has taken effect? and, if so, what is the power of the charm? After the title "Thane of Cawdor" is given to Macbeth, why does he not also let "Chance" crown him? Macbeth himself gives any number of reasons why he should merely wait instead of



murdering Duncan. He is afraid of the "even-handed justice" which plagues the inventor of "bloody instructions". Duncan is at Macbeth's castle in "dubious trust" in that he is both king and kinsman to Macbeth. As Duncan is his guest, Macbeth "should against his murderer shut the door". Finally, Duncan has been such a good king that "his virtues will plead like angels, trumpet-tongued, against/The deep damnation of his taking off" (I,vii,7-20).<sup>35</sup> The numerous absolute presuppositions that Shakespeare here sets up for examination, when placed within the context of the subsequent murder, need no comment.

We also feel the shudder profoundly when we see the results of Lady Macbeth's affection for her husband. It first causes her to desire to be "unsexed", and then to chastise her husband for lack of courage, for example:

I have given suck, and know  
How tender 'tis to love the babe that milks me:  
I would, while it was smiling in my face,  
Have pluck'd my nipple from his boneless gums,  
And dash'd the brains out, had I so sworn  
As you have done to this.

(I,vii,54-59)

In context, this speech is both terrifying and even a little funny: to paraphrase Koestler, the audience may be deeply moved by the predicament that the Macbeths are in but we are unable to suppress a smile at its ludicrous aspect.<sup>36</sup>





- (8) SHOCK EFFECTS IN MACBETH OFTEN COME FROM SHAKESPEARE'S JUXTAPOSING TWO USUALLY UNRELATED MATRICES. FOR EXAMPLE, "LOOK LIKE TH' INNOCENT FLOWER BUT BE THE SERPENT UNDER 'T."

With the technique of radical juxtaposition there is a kind of blending of the horrible and the comic; but, we must remember that, as Susan Sontag says, our laughter "does not make it [the work of art which employs the technique] any less terrifying." The "extremes of disrelation" that are "preeminently the subject of comedy"<sup>37</sup> are used in Macbeth both for their shock effects and for the intensification of the tragic and comic elements.

Whole scenes are juxtaposed: the Porter's scene with the murder scene: the Macduff family slaughter scene with the political scene between Malcolm and Macduff.<sup>38</sup> Several actions are radically juxtaposed: the meeting between the two brave and honourable men and the three hideously ugly and evil witches (at which Banquo's bravado and sureness is contrasted with Macbeth's dread); Macbeth's display of timidity and conscience is set against his wife's witch-like invocation of the powers of darkness; Macbeth's retreat from the chamber where he has left Duncan with "his silver skin lac'd with his golden blood" (II,iii,112) while Duncan's two sons cry murder and laugh in their sleep; the solemnity of the



banquet with Macbeth's raving about the ghost; the joy of the witches while mixing in the hideous dismembered parts of animals and men with the seriousness and fear that causes Macbeth to seek them out; the appearance of the apparitions that offer Macbeth security is set against the calling forth of the fearsome line of kings, all of Banquo's issue; Macbeth's bravado in the castle while forces outside are readied for his destruction.

The dialogue, too, of Macbeth affords many examples of the technique's use. The pun is of course comical because of its bringing together of two unconnected matrices; perhaps the best (and blackest) pun of the play is to be found within a larger radical juxtaposition in Lady Macbeth's line: "But screw your courage to the sticking-place" (I,vii,61). Apart from the pun, however, there are still a great many instances of the technique in the language and imagery, for example:

Thou wouldst be great;  
 Art not without ambition, but without  
 The illness should attend it . . .  
 (I, v, 18-20)

. . . his virtues  
 Will plead like angels, trumpet-tongu'd against  
 The deep damnation of his taking off;  
 and Pity, like a naked new-born babe,  
Striding the blast, . . .  
 . . . . .  
 . . . . . I have no spur  
 To prick the sides of my intent, but only  
 Vaulting ambition, . . .  
 (I,vii,18-27)



I had thought to  
 have let in some of all professions, that go  
 the primrose way to th' everlasting bonfire.  
 (II,iii,65)

There the grown serpent [Banquo] lies; the worm  
[Fleance] that's fled,  
 Hath nature that in time will venom breed,  
 No teeth for th' present . . .  
 (III,iv,28-30)

Here's the smell of blood still: all the  
perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand.  
 (V,i,48-49)

If thou couldst, Doctor, cast  
 The water of my land, find her disease,  
 And purge it to a sound and pristine health . . .  
 (V,iii,50-52)

Arthur Koestler explains the effect of such radical  
 juxtapositions on the audience:

[The audience] has its expectations shattered and its reason  
 affronted by the impact of the second matrix on the first;  
 instead of fusion there is collision; and in the mental  
 disarray which ensues, emotion, deserted by reason, is  
 flushed out in laughter.<sup>39</sup>





- (9) SHAKESPEARE MAKES HIS AUDIENCE FEEL THE ABSURDITY OF THE FAMILIAR BY HAVING HIS CHARACTERS EXCHANGE BANALITIES IN EXTREME SITUATIONS.

The aim of both techniques, radical juxtaposition and evocation of metaphysical shudder, is therefore the same: both would destroy conventional meanings and create new meanings or counter meanings<sup>41</sup> by effecting in the audience a composite of terror and laughter. The third type of bisociative act -- banal explosion -- is also similar in intention and effect.

The banal is fractured in either of two ways: by raising or lowering the level on which it commonly occurs, or, by placing it in context with the grotesque. Koestler explains that

the confrontation with an alien matrix reveals in a sharp, pitiless light what we failed to see in following our dim routines; the tacit assumptions hidden in the rules of the game are dragged into the open. The bisociative shock shatters the frame of complacent habits of thinking; the seemingly obvious is made to yield its secret.<sup>42</sup>

Partridge defines 'banal' thus:

'of or for obligatory feudal service', hence 'merely obligatory; perfunctory', hence (1778) 'commonplace, trite'.<sup>43</sup>

Shipley also adds to our understanding of the archetypal situations in which men store energy by employing trite or commonplace language:



From the idea of the ban as that which was for general use (e.g. the bannal mill, the lord's mill, where all his serfs must grind), for everybody's use, came the sense of the adj. banal, commonplace, trite.<sup>44</sup>

An artist like Shakespeare, by placing such commonplaces en situation on stage, releases the energy stored in the exchange of banalities. Shakespeare in Macbeth makes poetry out of banality as can be seen in the conversation that takes place before Macbeth's castle:

Dun. This castle hath a pleasant seat; the air  
Nimbly and sweetly recommends itself  
Unto our gentle senses.

Ban. This guest of summer,  
The temple haunting martlet, does approve,  
.....  
Where they most breed and haunt, I have observ'd  
The air is delicate.

(I,vi,1-10)

This conversation, out of context, would be little more than a commonplace compliment devoid of any special significance. However, coming as it does, just after we have witnessed the provisions that Lady Macbeth has begun for Duncan's visit, there is a distinct newness and freshness released from what would ordinarily be hackneyed and customary. That a certain terror is evoked in the audience is proven by a statement made by the editor Furness:

How often in witnessing this scene have I felt a wish that some suspicion of foul play would flash across the mind of Banquo, and that he would hang upon the robes of the king and implore him not to enter.<sup>40</sup>



A very similar feeling is prompted in the audience by the homely exchange of pleasantries between Macbeth and the noblemen, Macduff and Lenox, who have come to wake the now unwakeable Duncan:

Len. Good morrow, noble Sir!  
 Macb. Good morrow, both!  
 Macd. Is the King stirring worthy Thane?  
 Macb. Not yet.  
 Macd. He did command me to call timely on him:  
 I have almost slipp'd the hour.  
 Macb. I'll bring you to him.  
 Macd. I know this is a joyful trouble to you;  
 But yet 'tis one.  
 Macb. The labour we delight in physics pain.  
This is the door.  
 Macd. I'll make so bold to call,  
 For 'tis my limited service.  
 Len. Goes the King hence to-day?  
 Macb. He does: -- he did appoint so.  
 Len. The night has been unruly . . . .  
 . . . . .  
 Macb. 'Twas a rough night.  
 Len. My young remembrance cannot parallel  
 A fellow to it.

(II,iii,45-64)

Once again the banal is infused with new meaning. The audience discovers "the absurdity of the familiar and the familiarity of the absurd."<sup>45</sup> This is so even if we miss Macbeth's terrible pun, "This is the door."





- (10) THE COMIC ELEMENTS HIGHLIGHT IN MACBETH THE DISCONTENT THAT RESULTS FROM THE PLAYWRIGHT'S CONSCIOUSNESS OF THE BANALITY OF EVIL.

Shakespeare is thus the rebel dramatist who attacks the conventional in life and art, giving both new meaning and mystery. Through Macbeth he shows his discontent with the conditions of existence: Macbeth demonstrates the change of order, internal and external, in a world where social order is founded on murder and execution. In this world man's life is geared by reason and its correlative, outrunning of reason -- both of which can be turned against him to either prolong his suffering or bring on his ultimate downfall. Shakespeare is the "apostate priest"

without an orthodoxy, without even much of a congregation, who conducts his service within the hideous architecture of the absurd. A missionary of discord, he spreads a gospel of insurrection, trying to substitute his inspired vision for traditional values, trying to improvise a ritual out of anguish and frustration. Instead of myths of communion, he offers myths of dispersal; instead of consoling sermons, painful demands; instead of a liturgy of acceptance, a liturgy of complaint.<sup>46</sup>

The quintessence of Shakespeare's "service" is, of course, Macbeth himself. Macbeth is a combination of the "anti-hero"<sup>47</sup> of existential revolt and the "superman"<sup>48</sup> of messianic revolt. Macbeth is the outcast and criminal





suffering from nostalgia and loneliness tinged with regret:

I have liv'd long enough: my way of life  
Is fall'n into the sere, the yellow leaf;  
And that which should accompany old age,  
As honour, love, obedience, troops of friends,  
I must not look to have; but in their stead  
Curses, not loud, but deep, mouth-honour, breath,  
Which the poor heart would fain deny, and dare not.  
(V,iii,22-28)

Macbeth is also, however, the man who would "build a church"<sup>49</sup>. He would defeat the old order and create a world where one could "play the humble host" (II,iii,4) without the interference of the "Rebellious dead" (IV,i,97); where there would be no new thief ready and powerful enough to steal the crown; where "th' assassination/ Could trammel up the consequence" (I,vii,2-3) and the deed once "done" would be truly "done". Such a "church" is, by definition alone, nothing but a desperate and completely inconceivable hope in the absurd world of the trammel net. Macbeth's order is defeated by its inception: he would end evil by doing evil deeds himself, and these deeds can only lead to further evils.

The blackness of this view is augmented and intensified by the abundance of comic elements spotted throughout the play. The various comic elements provide the "bludgeon blow" that Ionesco says is necessary to tear us "away from the everyday, from habit, from mental



laziness, which hides from us the strangeness of reality."<sup>50</sup> The seemingly comic ending of Macbeth, the triumph of the "good" that achieves its triumph through Macbeth's methods of equivocation and execution, thus adds to the bitterness of the tragic farce. Jan Kott points out that we feel no catharsis at the end of Macbeth.<sup>51</sup> In order to feel a purging of the emotions we must experience some sort of reconciliation with the universe. If, however, we see that there is no triumph of the moral order, that man is merely a trapped animal, and that the universe is essentially meaningless and hostile, we cannot feel that reconciliation. Instead, we learn what Edward Bond calls the art of "clutching at straws"<sup>52</sup> by being shown the banality of evil. Hannah Arendt's insights about the eternal ubiquity of Eichmann's evil might equally well be applied to Macbeth; she says

. . . it would have been very comforting indeed to believe that Eichmann was a monster, even though if he had been Israel's case against him would have collapsed or, at the very least, lost all interest. Surely, one can hardly call upon the whole world and gather correspondents from the four corners of the earth in order to display Bluebeard in the dock. The trouble with Eichmann was precisely that so many were like him, and that the many were neither perverted nor sadistic, that they were, and still are, terribly and terrifyingly normal. . . . This normality was much more terrifying than all the atrocities put together . . .<sup>53</sup>



Or, as Shakespeare himself puts it:

Son. And must they all be hanged that swear and lie?

L. Macd. Every one.

Son. Who must hang them?

L. Macd. Why the honest men.

Son. Then the liars and swearers are fools; for there  
are liars and swearers enow to beat the honest  
men, and hang up them.

(IV,ii,51-57)





## FOOTNOTES

### Chapter I

<sup>1</sup>Durrenmatt, Romulus, 119.

<sup>2</sup>Durrenmatt, Four Plays, 43.

<sup>3</sup>Durrenmatt, "Problems of the Theatre," 33.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 34.

<sup>5</sup>A word of caution is in order here in that Durrenmatt himself says, "... my theatre is open to many interpretations and appears to confuse some. Misunderstandings creep in, as when someone looks around desperately in the chicken coop of my plays, hoping to find the egg of Columbus which I stubbornly refuse to lay" ("Problems of the Theatre," 22).

<sup>6</sup>Durrenmatt, "Problems of the Theatre," 34.

<sup>7</sup>Durrenmatt, Romulus, 97.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., 123.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 48-49.

<sup>10</sup>Durrenmatt, "Problems of the Theatre," 16.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 35.

<sup>12</sup>Durrenmatt, Romulus, 69.

<sup>13</sup>Camus, Myth of Sisyphus, 11.

<sup>14</sup>Esslin, "Pinter and the Absurd," 177.

<sup>15</sup>Pinter, The Dumb Waiter, 85.



<sup>16</sup>Taylor, The Rise and Fall of the Well-made Play, 163.

<sup>17</sup>Pinter, The Dumb Waiter, 98.

<sup>18</sup>Camus, Myth of Sisyphus, 44.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., 39.

<sup>20</sup>Kafka, The Trial, 103-112.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., 107.

<sup>22</sup>Pinter, The Dumb Waiter, 99.

<sup>23</sup>Beckett, Waiting for Godot, 51.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., 10, 18, 35.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., 7.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., 7.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., 8.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., 10.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., 11.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., 13.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., 13.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., 14.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., 14.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., 44.



- <sup>35</sup>Ibid., 28.
- <sup>36</sup>Sartre, "Forger of Myths," 325.
- <sup>37</sup>Ibid., 326.
- <sup>38</sup>Sartre, In Camera, 160.
- <sup>39</sup>Ibid., 166.
- <sup>40</sup>Ibid., 191.
- <sup>41</sup>Ibid., 165.
- <sup>42</sup>Price, The Narrow Pass, 44.
- <sup>43</sup>Sartre, In Camera, 187.
- <sup>44</sup>Abel, Metatheatre, 83.
- <sup>45</sup>Hereinafter referred to as Marat-Sade.
- <sup>46</sup>Abel, Metatheatre, 45-46.
- <sup>47</sup>Weiss, Marat-Sade, 16.
- <sup>48</sup>Ibid., 142.
- <sup>49</sup>Abel, Metatheatre, 46.
- <sup>50</sup>Weiss, Marat-Sade, 20.
- <sup>51</sup>Ibid., 10.
- <sup>52</sup>Willet, Brecht on Theatre, 136.
- <sup>53</sup>Ibid., 136.
- <sup>54</sup>Abel, Metatheatre, 58.



<sup>55</sup>Weiss, Marat-Sade, 120.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., 110.

<sup>57</sup>Abel, Metatheatre, 59.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid., 80.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid., 81-82.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid., 82.

<sup>61</sup>Genet, Thief's Journal, 75.

<sup>62</sup>Genet, The Balcony, 1.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid., 3.

<sup>64</sup>Ibid., 4.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid., 6.

<sup>66</sup>Ibid., 6.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid., 6.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid., 33.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid., 56.

<sup>70</sup>Ibid., 65.

<sup>71</sup>Kantorowicz gives a detailed study of the "double-body" in his book The King's Two Bodies.

<sup>72</sup>Genet, The Balcony, 96.

<sup>73</sup>Ibid., 96.

<sup>74</sup>Ibid., 7.





<sup>75</sup>Ibid., 12.

<sup>76</sup>Ibid., 114.

<sup>77</sup>Genet, "A Note on Theatre," 40.

<sup>78</sup>Abel, Metatheatre, 83.

<sup>79</sup>Genet, The Balcony, 115.

<sup>80</sup>Williamson, Donne Tradition, 244-245.

<sup>81</sup>Ibid., 90.

<sup>82</sup>Ibid., 93.

<sup>83</sup>Collingwood, Metaphysics, 33.

<sup>84</sup>Ibid., 33.

<sup>85</sup>Ibid., 48.

<sup>86</sup>Williamson, Donne Tradition, 97.

<sup>87</sup>Bond, Saved, 61.

<sup>88</sup>Ibid., 12.

<sup>89</sup>Ibid., 13.

<sup>90</sup>Ibid., 15.

<sup>91</sup>Ibid., 16-17.

<sup>92</sup>Ibid., 62-70.

<sup>93</sup>Ibid., 8 [author's note.] .

<sup>94</sup>Collingwood, Metaphysics, 42, 44.



- <sup>95</sup>M.V. Thom, "A Letter," in PP, XIII No. 6 (Feb. 1966), 6.
- <sup>96</sup>Artaud, The Theatre and its Double, 31-32.
- <sup>97</sup>Sontag, Against Interpretation, 269-271.
- <sup>98</sup>Kirby, Happenings, 21.
- <sup>99</sup>Script and description in Kirby, Happenings, 92-104.
- <sup>100</sup>Statement, script and description in Kirby, Happenings, 200-219.
- <sup>101</sup>Script in TDR, X, 195-202.
- <sup>102</sup>Kirby, Happenings, 97.
- <sup>103</sup>*Ibid.*, 103-104.
- <sup>104</sup>*Ibid.*, 200-201.
- <sup>105</sup>*Ibid.*, 210.
- <sup>106</sup>*Ibid.*, 211.
- <sup>107</sup>*Ibid.*, 213.
- <sup>108</sup>Ashley, Combination Wedding and Funeral, 196.
- <sup>109</sup>*Ibid.*, 200.
- <sup>110</sup>Artaud, The Theatre and its Double, 79.
- <sup>111</sup>*Ibid.*, 75.
- <sup>112</sup>Ionesco, Notes and Counter Notes, 177.
- <sup>113</sup>*Ibid.*, 175.



<sup>114</sup>Ionesco, "Point of Departure," 18.

<sup>115</sup>Ionesco, Notes and Counter Notes, 180.

<sup>116</sup>Sontag, Against Interpretation, 118.

<sup>117</sup>Ionesco, Bald Soprano, 8.

<sup>118</sup>Ibid., 11.

<sup>119</sup>Ibid., 15-18.

<sup>120</sup>Ibid., 37.

<sup>121</sup>R.N. Coe explains Ionesco's use of the platitude: . . . nothing is achieved by merely enunciating a commonplace unless, by its very method of enunciation, its essential commonplaceness is made apparent. . . . The essence of the platitude is that it is both spoken and listened to, without any immediate awareness of its meaning (or lack of meaning) being present in the mind of either speaker or hearer. Ionesco's problem is that somehow the phrase whose very essence is meaningless insignificance should become significant without thereby becoming meaningful. It must visibly destroy itself, reveal its own absurdity. Thus Ionesco's platitudes are more than commonplaces; they are commonplaces that compel the attention. They proliferate page after page, and startle by their very mass . . . (Ionesco, 48).

<sup>122</sup>Ionesco, Bald Soprano, 38-39.

<sup>123</sup>Ibid., 40.

<sup>124</sup>Artaud, The Theatre and its Double, 46.

<sup>125</sup>Brustein, The Theatre of Revolt, 8-9.

<sup>126</sup>Ibid., 16.

<sup>127</sup>Albee, Zoo Story, 11.





<sup>128</sup>Ibid., 38.

<sup>129</sup>Ibid., 40.

<sup>130</sup>Ibid., 23.

<sup>131</sup>Ibid., 17.

<sup>132</sup>Ibid., 27-28.

<sup>133</sup>Albee, Preface to The American Dream, 53-54.

<sup>134</sup>Albee, Zoo Story, 37.

<sup>135</sup>Brustein, The Theatre of Revolt, 27.

<sup>136</sup>Albee, Zoo Story, 45.

<sup>137</sup>Ibid., 28.

<sup>138</sup>Ibid., 24.

<sup>139</sup>Brustein, The Theatre of Revolt, 28.

<sup>140</sup>Ibid., 26.

<sup>141</sup>Ibid., 28.

<sup>142</sup>Ibid., 18-21.

<sup>143</sup>Albee, Zoo Story, 35.

<sup>144</sup>Zimbardo, "Symbolism and Naturalism in Edward Albee's Zoo Story," 14.

<sup>145</sup>Albee, Zoo Story, 32, 20, 48.

<sup>146</sup>Ibid., 21.

<sup>147</sup>Brustein, The Theatre of Revolt, 13.



## CHAPTER II

<sup>1</sup>Trilling, Beyond Culture, 10.

<sup>2</sup>Kott, Shakespeare Our Contemporary, 131.

<sup>3</sup>Durrenmatt, "Problems of the Theatre," 39.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 39.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 33.

<sup>6</sup>Mahood, Shakespeare's Wordplay, 130. Miss Mahood points out that Coleridge said he was unable to recall one pun or wordplay in Macbeth; she finds over one hundred.

<sup>7</sup>All references are to the Arden edition by Kenneth Muir.

<sup>8</sup>Koestler, Act of Creation, 61.

<sup>9</sup>Ionesco, "Discovering the Theatre," 86.

<sup>10</sup>Sontag, Against Interpretation, 274.

<sup>11</sup>Ionesco, "Discovering the Theatre," 86.

<sup>12</sup>Knight, "Macbeth and the Metaphysics of Evil," 91.

<sup>13</sup>Kott, Shakespeare Our Contemporary, 47, 140.

<sup>14</sup>Cohn, "Latter Day Pinter," 369.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., 369.

<sup>16</sup>cf. I,i,8-9; III,v; and IV,i,39-43.

<sup>17</sup>Pinter, Dumb Waiter, 98.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., 112.



<sup>19</sup>This is, after all, one of the few unequivocal possible reasons given in the course of the play for Gus' death.

<sup>20</sup>Huntley, "Macbeth and the Background of Jesuitical Equivocation," 379.

<sup>21</sup>Sartre, "Forgers of Myth," 328.

<sup>22</sup>Furness, Variorum, 31-32, [editor's note].

<sup>23</sup>Kott, Shakespeare Our Contemporary, 10.

<sup>24</sup>Price, The Narrow Pass, 44.

<sup>25</sup>Random House Dictionary of English Language, ed. by Jess Stein, Random House, New York, 1967 (1966): "trammel net, a three-layered net, the middle layer of which is fine-meshed, the others coarse-meshed, so that fish attempting to pass through the net will become entangled in one or more of the meshes."

<sup>26</sup>Kott, Shakespeare Our Contemporary, 92-93.

<sup>27</sup>Koestler, Act of Creation, 57.

<sup>28</sup>*Ibid.*, 58.

<sup>29</sup>Durrenmatt, "Problems of the Theatre," 35.

<sup>30</sup>Koestler, Act of Creation, 45.

<sup>31</sup>Kott, Shakespeare Our Contemporary, 19-20.

<sup>32</sup>For a fuller description of the Metaphysical Shudder refer to pages 32-39 of this essay.

<sup>33</sup>Williamson, Donne Tradition, 93.



<sup>33</sup>Williamson, Donne Tradition, 93.

<sup>34</sup>Duncan's words, "What he hath lost, noble Macbeth hath won" (I,ii,69), also echo the Witches' "When the battle's lost and won" (I,i,4).

<sup>35</sup>I take these reasons to be rationalizations of Macbeth's feeling of dread.

<sup>36</sup>Koestler, Act of Creation, 55.

<sup>37</sup>Sontag, Against Interpretation, 274.

<sup>38</sup>The audience here has the superior knowledge common in most dramatically comic situations.

<sup>39</sup>Koestler, Act of Creation, 95.

<sup>40</sup>Furness, Variorum, 88, [editor's note].

<sup>41</sup>Sontag, Against Interpretation, 269.

<sup>42</sup>Koestler, Act of Creation, 74.

<sup>43</sup>Partridge, A Short Etymological Dictionary of Modern English, 39.

<sup>44</sup>Shipley, Dictionary of Word Origins, 37.

<sup>45</sup>Koestler, Act of Creation, 74.

<sup>46</sup>Brustein, The Theatre of Revolt, 16.

<sup>47</sup>*Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>48</sup>*Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>49</sup>*Ibid.*, 19.





<sup>50</sup>Ionesco, "Discovering the Theatre," 86.

<sup>51</sup>Kott, Shakespeare Our Contemporary, 97.

<sup>52</sup>Bond, Saved, 7, [author's note].

<sup>53</sup>Arendt, Eichmann in Jerusalem, 253.



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### Journal Abbreviations

AR	Antioch Review
DS	Drama Survey
DUJ	Durham University Journal
EST	English Studies Today
MD	Modern Drama
MR	Minnesota Review
PMLA	Publications of the Modern Language Association
PP	Plays and Players
PQ	Philological Quarterly
PR	Partisan Review
SAB	Shakespeare Association Bulletin
SJ	Shakespeare Jahrbuch
SP	Studies in Philology
SQ	Shakespeare Quarterly
SR	Sewanee Review
SS	Shakespeare Survey
SWR	Southwest Review
TA	Theatre Arts
TC	Twentieth Century
TCL	Twentieth Century Literature
TDR	Tulane Drama Review
YFS	Yale French Studies
YR	The Yale Review



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